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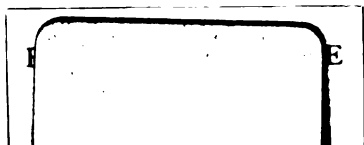
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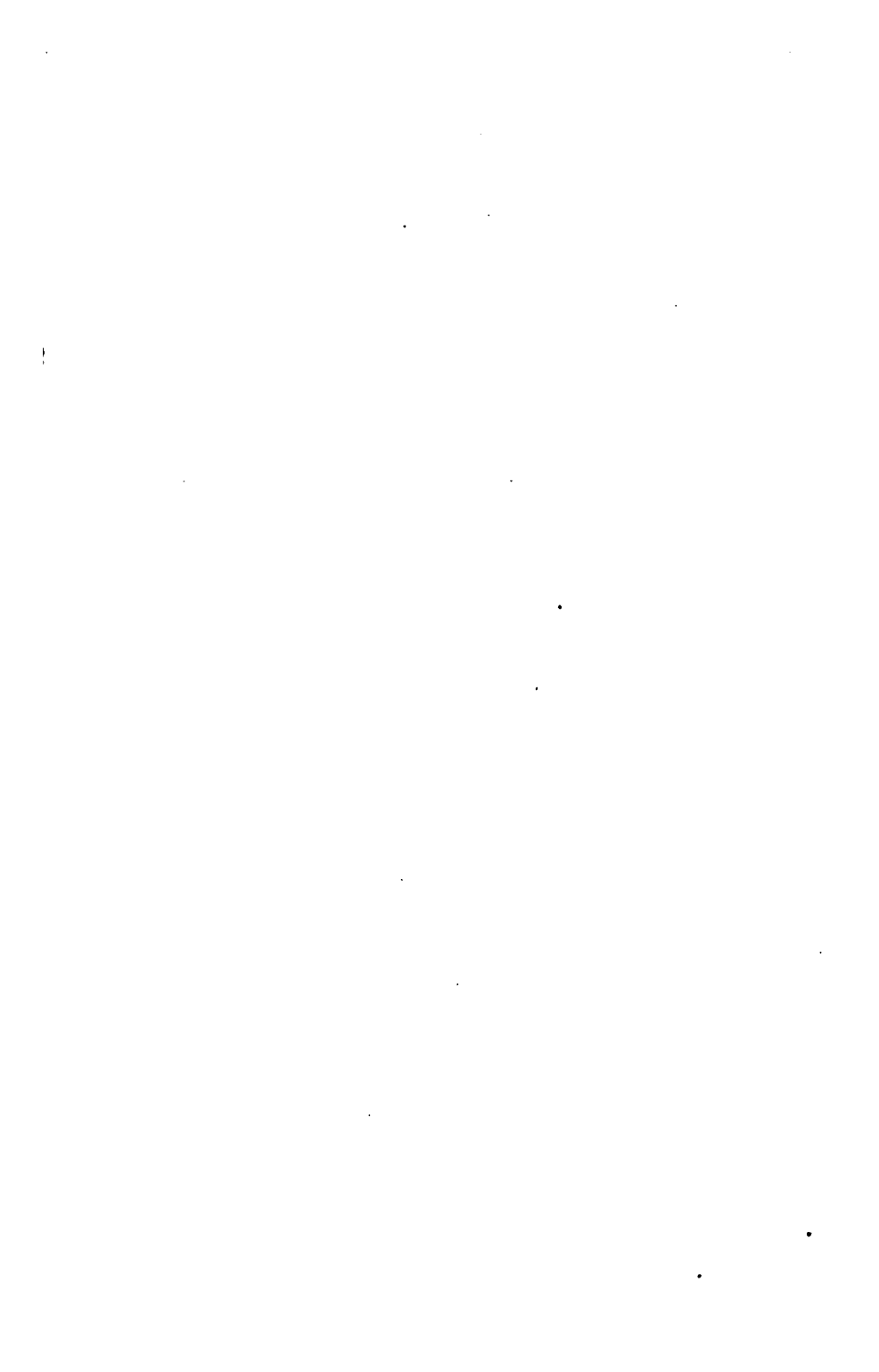
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Daniel C. Payne
to the Porc. Club
May 19. 1880

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A D È L E ;

A TALE.

BY

JULIA KAVANAGH,

AUTHOR OF "NATHALIE," "RACHEL GRAY," &c., &c.

"She dwelt among the untrodden ways.

A maid, whom there were none to praise,
And very few to love."—WORDSWORTH.

THREE VOLUMES IN ONE.

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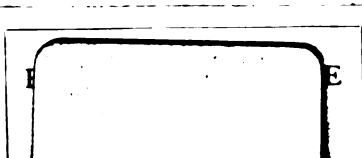
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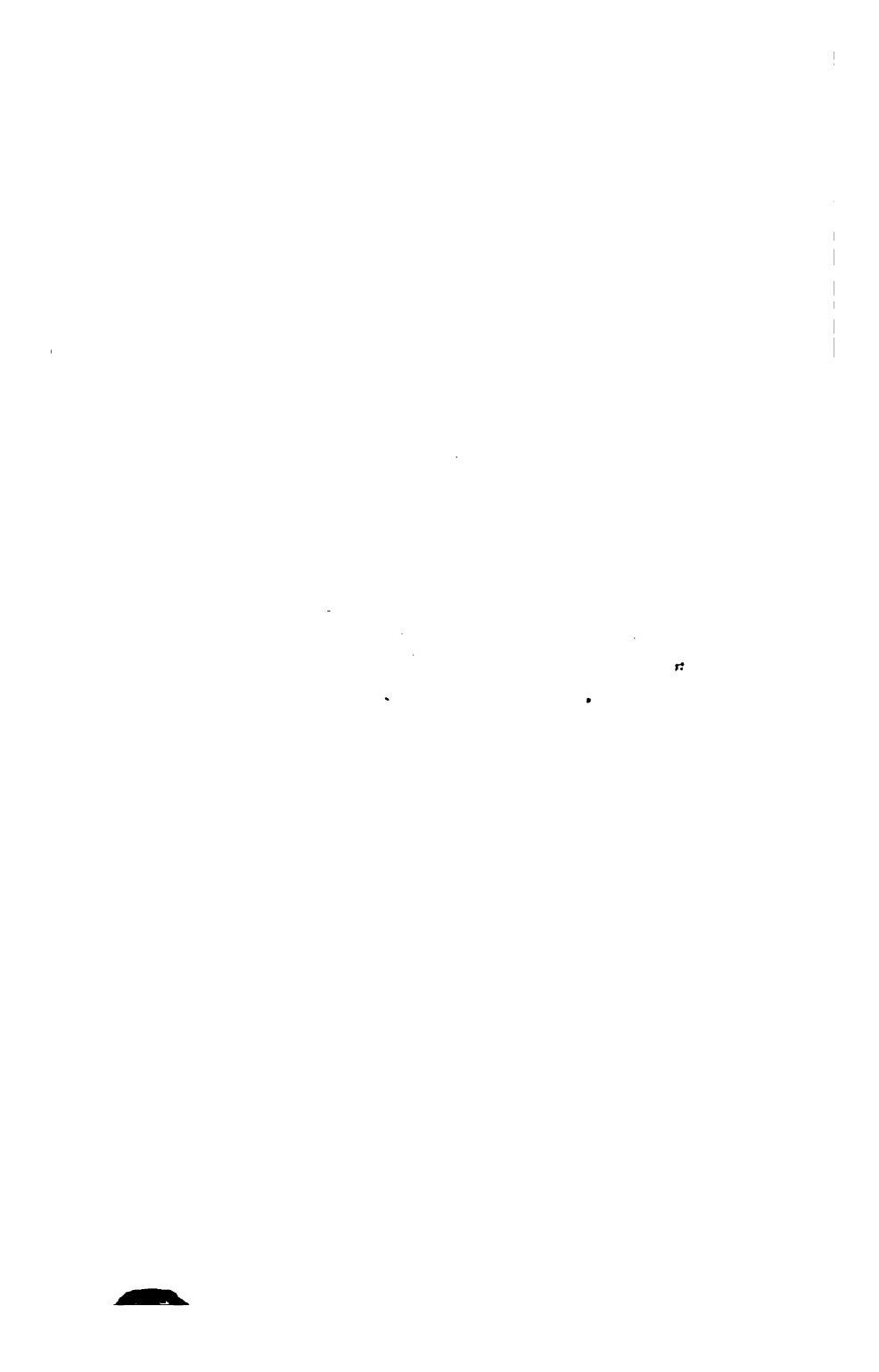
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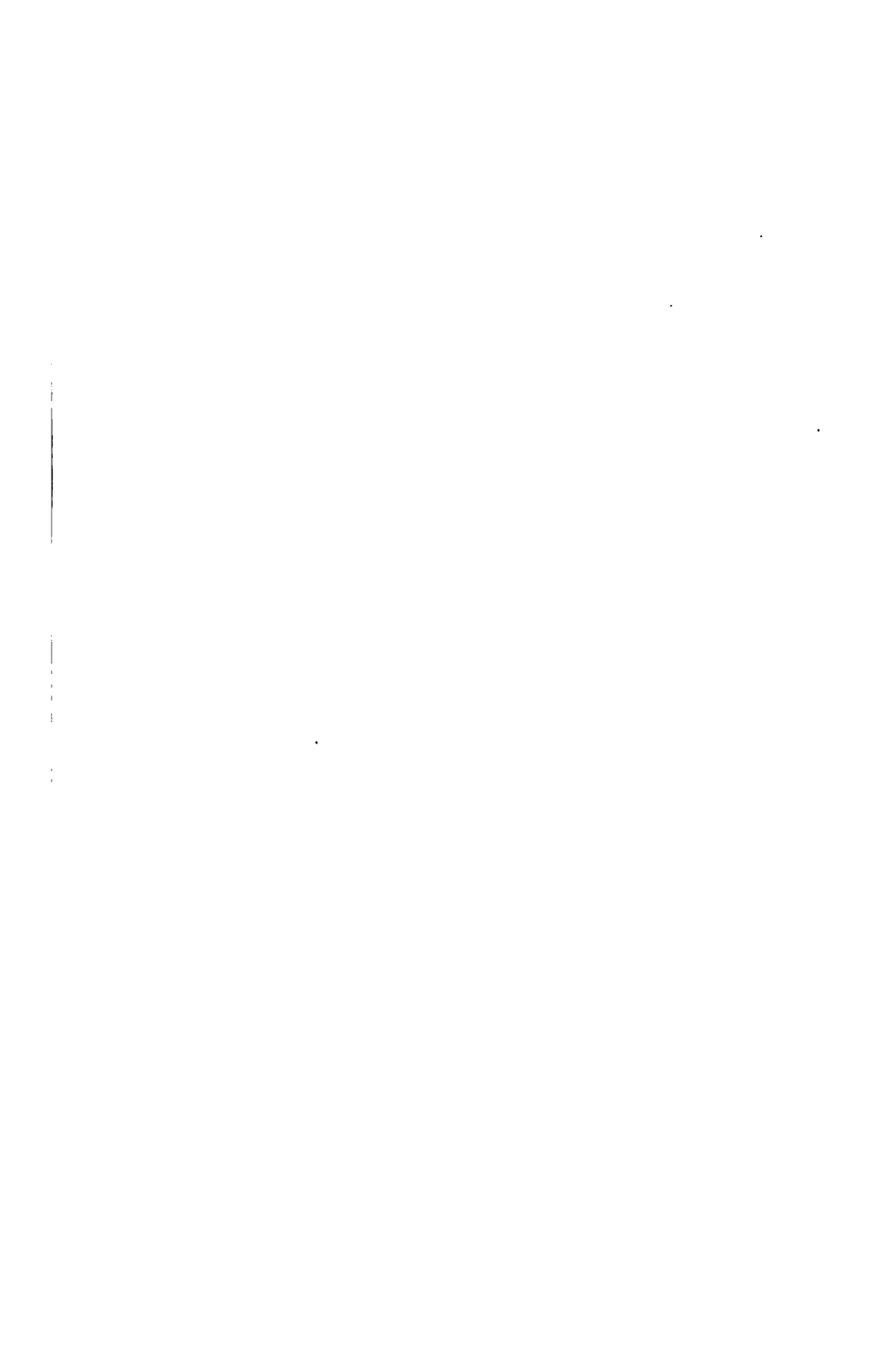
TO THE READER.

THERE is no reason why the Author of this work should trouble the public with a preface explanatory of a very simple tale; but she feels bound, in self-justice, to state, that, for motives on which she need not enter here, she has taken liberties with the topography of the Département de l'Ain, as well as with the names of various localities mentioned in the following pages.

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Daniel C. Payne
to the Por. Club
May 19. 188

And to his dying day he kept her ignorant; to his dying day he gave her the coldest share in his liking—the most niggardly portion in his esteem and confidence. Mrs. Osborne bore with what she could not help; she dropped her Catholic tendencies, and became High Church. The portrait of the Prince Regent replaced the bust of Napoleon. As to Voltaire, Mrs. Osborne had heard of him, indeed, but she hoped he was not so wicked, so dreadful as people thought. Her own convictions were, she thanked heaven, too firm to be unsettled easily; and though she had the misfortune not to agree with her dear William on some important points, yet there was one consolation—he had left her her children.

Yet, spite all this, the world gave Mrs. Osborne but a cold share in its graces. High-Church ladies were shy of her. She was pious, charitable, correct, yet she convinced no one. In vain she laid herself out, in vain she lived in style; so far her husband gratified her. People danced at her balls, and ate her dinners, and did not care for her.

There was a feeling abroad, not that Mrs. Osborne was not sincere, not that she was a time-server, who bent to every idol and every worship, but that she had no real, substantial power. Her husband did not care for her; her step-son had braved her openly; her children made no account of her; and the world saw this, and valued Mrs. Osborne accordingly.

But no one knew better, and valued Mrs. Osborne less, than her step-son. Indeed, he valued her too little, or he despised her too much; and because she had never deceived him, he concluded, unwisely, that she was not a dangerous enemy and a more dangerous friend. She had no share in the anxious and wearisome thoughts which now absorbed him.

He had sat down again; suddenly, without knock or warning, the door opened, and Robert and his two sisters entered. They came laden with a declaration of war. At a glance, Mr. Osborne saw it, and he could not help smiling. He wheeled his chair round, and faced the three.

Isabella stepped haughtily forward—"I oppose the will," she said, dogmatically. "I give you fair warning, William—I oppose it."

"There never was such a cruel, selfish affair," fretfully began Anna; "I shall certainly not allow myself to be despoiled in that way."

Robert was not remarkable for eloquence; all he could find to say was the observation, doggedly uttered, of

"It won't stand, you know—can't."

Their elder brother gave them a compassionate look.

"Poor young simpletons!" he said, with more irony than wrath, "have you for the last five years been living in this style, with a mansion in town and a lodge in the country?—with carriages and horses—hounds, too, I believe—with foreign tours, and home-splendours?—with a locust-like array of servants, retainers, and friends? and have you really thought that it would last? I am amazed at your folly, and still more at your blindness!"

Severe was his tone as he concluded. A dim revelation of ruin floated before the three allies, but they would not give in.

"I tell you I oppose the will!" said Isabella, strongly.

"Very well!" was the calm reply.

"I shall not submit," said Anna, "on no account."

"Very well!"

"It can't stand, and it sha'n't!" growled Robert.

"Very well!" persisted their phlegmatic brother.

His coolness, his amused, and yet pitying smile, his absence of wrath, disconcerted them. They exchanged alarmed looks. What more they would have said, we cannot record. Again the door opened; this time it was their mother who entered. She gave them a severe, suspicious glance, but said, with grave gentleness—

"Robert, Isabella, Anna, my dear, I wish to speak to your brother William alone."

They obeyed ungraciously, though well pleased in reality to obey.

There was a pause after their departure. Mrs. Osborne sat down in a deep chair facing her step-son's, and said, softly—

"William, I hope the children have not annoyed you?"

"Oh, no," he calmly answered; "they are sore because they do not know the truth, and think themselves harshly used. They will do me, or, rather, their father—for what have I to do in this?—ample justice yet."

His stepmother looked more disturbed than surprised. She gave him a searching, anxious look, which he met with great composure. She was agitated, for one habitually so calm, but he was silent; he made no offer to meet her half-way. Compelled to speak, she said, at length—

"William, what do you mean?"

"I mean," he composedly replied, "that this large inheritance which I have this day received, is left to me in trust; by

no means for my personal use or enjoyment. Surely I need not inform you that it makes me none the richer than I was yesterday."

Mrs. Osborne seemed to wish to pass lightly over this.

"Yes, yes, I understand," she said quickly; "your father was too just, too upright—he gave you great power—but it was for the good of his children and their mother. And what have you decided on?"

"On nothing as yet," he slowly replied; "perhaps you are not aware, ma'am," he added, fixing his dark eye on his step-mother, "that my father's affairs were and are in a most embarrassed state."

"Indeed!"

"Ay, indeed! But do not misunderstand me; dishonour cannot reach my father's name. He spent and speculated to rashness; from disgrace he ever remained free."

She raised her hand to her forehead.

"Is it ruin?" she asked.

"Very nearly so," he calmly replied.

"What do you mean to do?"

"There is nothing to do, but to go on and be ruined outright."

Mrs. Osborne gnawed her pale lip, and looked fixedly before her.

"But in the meanwhile—" she suggested.

"Oh! in the meanwhile, the only thing is to sell off, pay all debts, and, so far as is possible, provide for you and your children."

Mrs. Osborne looked alarmed, and tried to smile.

"Matters cannot be so bad," she said, "your father hoped, or he would not have left the business to you."

"It was because my father did not hope, that he did leave all to me," said Mr. Osborne; "he knew that he could trust my honour; he knew that nature never meant me to be a man of business."

"No—no; he thought highly of your talents," exclaimed Mrs. Osborne, with some eagerness; "besides, you were his elder son. It was just."

Mr. Osborne did not look convinced, and said very coldly:

"Excuse me, madam, but how could my father reckon on my doing after his death that which I had refused to do during his lifetime?"

Mrs. Osborne's handkerchief was ever that lady's most useful auxiliary. She raised it to her eyes, and said from behind it:

"Ah! William, a voice from the grave."

William frowned and looked bored, but did not answer.

"And there is still hope," pursued Mrs. Osborne, returning to the practical; "all cannot be over in England, and the connection in France is still splendid. You remember Courcelles?"

"I have not forgotten it," he replied with some emphasis; and his dark eyes met hers with grave sternness.

"Ah! there is much to be done there," she said, "much by one who knows the place and the people. My first husband was a Frenchman, as you know, and I shared his confidence and helped his views, and there is much to be done in Courcelles."

She paused, waiting for a reply; but Mr. Osborne preserved the listening attitude of one who receives information and has none to communicate. Mrs. Osborne coughed, and resumed with a sigh:

"For my own part, I care not what becomes of me: France, a desert, any place would be an acceptable home if, as I fear, Osborne Lodge must be relinquished."

"There is no doubt about that," observed Mr. Osborne; "Osborne Lodge, all its appurtenances, must be sold; the debts."

"Yes, yes," she interrupted, wincing, "my feeling quite. Honour before all, I said so from the first; but as I said, any place, any home you appoint will do for me—for the dear girls, who are both the most unselfish, the most devoted of daughters."

Mr. Osborne smiled.

"My sisters shall be thought of first," he said, "and in an hour I shall be able to give you a final answer."

"We are all in your hands," she said, with a constrained sigh. She rose; he walked with her to the door, closed it upon her and came back; and for an hour he paced that room, haunted by the Past, hating the Future.

Mr. Osborne had suffered, and got over his sufferings. In a careless, dreamy way, he was happy and enjoyed life. What, though the path to happiness was closed, that path which to youth's seeming stretches to the very horizon, and which to man's knowledge is but a few steps and ends in the barrenness of the desert; yet there is more in a man's life than domestic bliss or a woman's love. His intellect remained to him; his love of art, his delight in beautiful places and lovely things, and, with these and the means of wandering—for his tastes were simple, and required no more—many pleasures. But take away Liberty, and what was left to the sad and disappointed man?

With a sense of wrong and injury, Mr. Osborne looked up at his father's portrait. "I resisted him in life," he thought, bit-

terly, "and dear did it cost me. I obey him in death—I trust in God that it may not cost me dearer yet."

But his resolve was taken; he went down to the drawing-room, where his stepmother and her three children were sitting, sullen and silent: they knew all, and felt conquered. Mr. Osborne took a few turns in the room, then he came back to the table, around which his relatives were seated, and he said calmly—

"I am going to France in a week. I shall explain to Robert what he can do here in my absence. If you are willing to reside in Courcelles with my sisters, I shall be happy to see you there."

The last words were addressed to Mrs. Osborne.

"As you please, as you like," she said, graciously.

"That horrid lake and those horrid mountains will kill me," moaned Anna.

"I hope not," said Mr. Osborne, smiling.

"I don't care where I go," observed Isabella, tossing her haughty, handsome head; "I know I was too proud, too independent to be a favourite with Mr. Osborne. He has left me a beggar, but I don't care."

"I suppose you will leave me your instructions," sneered Robert.

"Of course," briefly replied his elder brother.

"Oh, what a noise they do make," murmured Anna; "and they know I have a head-ache—so selfish."

Mrs. Osborne's lip curled, and her blue eyes had a touch of scorn. "Who knows but I can lead him yet?" murmured ambition in her ear. "Who knows?"

William Osborne looked at his stepmother, whom he disliked; at his brother, whom he despised; at his sisters, whom he did not love, and he bowed his head before inexorable duty, and thought sadly: "The soldier must not shrink from the battle-day, the captain must not desert the sinking ship."

He saw the conflict, the storm, and their fatal end, and he saw no more. The hours of heavenly repose, the blessings unknown and unwished for, the unsuspected torments and trials that lay behind both in the bosom of the future year, were all alike hidden from his gaze in the Almighty and all-merciful Hand.

CHAPTER II.

HOW THE WORLD WAS GOING AWAY IN THE MANOR OF COURCELLES.

"THE world is going away," said Mademoiselle de Janson, "the world is going away."

Her melancholy look sought the high ceiling, then wandered over the oak-panelled walls of the old Hall, with its deep windows, until it finally came back to the stone chimney, high and deep, the smouldering wood fire, and the diminutive figure of her little goddaughter Adèle, sitting on a low stool, with her hands clasped around her knees, and the light of the dying flame playing on her wistful young face.

"Where is the world going to, Cousine?" she asked, looking up.

"There it is," exclaimed Mademoiselle de Janson, sitting up erect in her chair, "the very child asks where to, and who shall venture to answer the momentous question?"

She sank back with a sigh, and shut her eyes.

"Where can the world be going to?" thought Adèle, very much puzzled; "I wish she would tell me." She looked up at her godmother, and her thoughts took another turn.

"How pretty she must have been," she thought; "how pretty she is still,—more than pretty, beautiful; better than beautiful, lovely."

"Open the window, child," murmured Mademoiselle de Janson, "it is quite close."

"Of course it is with a fire," thought Adèle, but she did as she was told.

"My head aches!" moaned Mademoiselle de Janson, feebly.

"Are you sure it is your head, Cousine?" doubtfully asked Adèle.

"Well," confidentially replied Mademoiselle de Janson, "I am not; strange I should not know, is it not?"

"Very," replied Adèle, still looking admiringly at her cousin.

Mademoiselle de Janson had been a fair beauty, with golden hair, blue eyes, and an angelic face, and lovely she was still, at we might not say what age. She might be mad, as some said, or only whimsical, as the more indulgent averred; she certainly was peculiar, capricious to the tip of her fingers, perverse in her ways,

neither amiable nor kind, but she was lovely, and ever would be. Caprices, folly, faults without number, could not make her lose the gift; she was original, too, independent, and cared for nothing, and no one. Her favourite sentiment, "that the world was going away," gives a fair clue to her position and her character. A beauty must regret the past; a noble-born and impoverished lady cannot look with favour on a new order of things. To be sure, revolutions had nothing to do with the late Monsieur de Janson's passion for gambling; a passion that had left his daughter merely what the law would not allow him to touch—her mother's fortune, namely, the old manor in which she resided, and which she could not afford to keep in repair; a neglected garden and orchard, a few acres of indifferent land, and an object which, though a perfect eyesore to her aristocratic gaze, was, nevertheless, the chief source of her income, a forge let on an endless lease to an English capitalist, to whom, indeed, the whole estate was heavily mortgaged.

Mademoiselle de Janson had grown accustomed to her poverty—to her old ruined manor; but she had never reconciled herself to her plebeian possession, the forge. It was visible, she declared, from every window of her dwelling; and in whatever room she sat, she could hear, she averred, its clanking. To abuse and hate this enemy had become one of the chief occupations of Mademoiselle de Janson's life.

Adèle had risen; she was standing in one of the deep windows; she looked at a wild landscape; a rugged road wound by a silent lake; rocks hemmed in her view to the left; dark mountains rose to the right, and enclosed the sheet of water; a vapoury sky of summer blue softened the hues and outlines of the scene; it looked vivid, living; eternal in its beauty.

"Cousine," suddenly said Adèle, turning round, "do tell me how you know that the world is going away."

"Listen to that forge!—there, did you hear? And you ask if the world is going away! Take your doll, and play, child."

"I have no doll, Cousine."

"Well, play all the same. Go to the garden, child. I want to be alone."

Adèle, thus dismissed, quietly left the old hall. As she closed the heavy oak door, she heard Mademoiselle de Janson repeating to herself, by the fireside, those ominous words,—*"the world is going away."*

"How hard-hearted I must be," thought Adèle, half-remorsefully. "There is Cousine telling me from morning till night,

from night till morning, that the world is going away; and I sleep as well, and eat and drink as heartily, and run and laugh, and sing, and enjoy myself, just as much as if the world were standing still the whole time."

As Adèle came to this conclusion respecting the hardness of her heart, she left to her right a heavy wooden staircase that led to the upper part of the house, and passing under a stone porch, reached the head of a flight of broken steps that descended to the yard, or, rather, court, around which the old mansion was built.

A quiet spot was that flagged and grass-grown court, silent and secluded like a cloister. Shade seemed to dwell there for evermore; it stole down the gray stone walls that enclosed it, walls massive and rock-built, with tufts of green ferns or pale pink flowers in every cranny; it lingered around the broken windows that looked down quaint and dark with many a pane gone from its leaden casing; it slept around the damp old well in the farthest angle, and deepened the gloom of its dark round hole that went down to meet the chill, tremulous water below, where, looking over the broad stone ledge, you ever saw the blue sky reflected in a cold, white circle. But one spot gave light to this gray and quiet picture. A low, arched door stood wide open near the well; it revealed a stone staircase winding up in obscurity a long, dim passage, a second door, also wide open, and beyond it, vividly distinct, a green and sunny garden.

Whilst we have been describing, Adèle was crossing the court. She peeped into the well as she went by it, then passed under the low, arched door, crossed the long, sombre corridor, and came out at the other door. A broad garden, in the old and formal style, lay before her, and beyond it, the outline of blue or wooded hills rose on the noonday sky. On a bench at the foot of a broken statue that had once guarded the entrance of a long gravelled walk, passing between stiff boxwood hedge-rows, an old peasant woman, dry and brown as a nut, in white round cap, black boddice, and striped woollen petticoat, sat in the sun, spinning her wheel with dazzling rapidity. On seeing Adèle, she nodded and smiled. The young girl smiled too, and without proceeding further, sat down on the stone step on which she had been standing, and resting her elbow on her knee, and her cheek on her hand, she watched curiously the swift motion of the old woman's wheel.

"How fast it goes, Jeannette," she said.

"Yes, Mamzelle, very fast."

A long pause followed these two remarks. Adèle de Cour-

celles was then a small young girl of sixteen; her figure was childish, but perfect; her face fair—spite her brown hair—and very pretty; for her features, though slight, were clear and distinct in their outlines. She had dark eyebrows, and beneath them darker azure eyes; a quick look, a prompt, though graceful bearing, and something in her whole aspect that spoke of a rapidity of thought, speech, and feeling, that seemed not to care for time.

Her story is soon told. She was an orphan—the last of a noble and fallen line. She lived in the old manor that had been built by her ancestors, and where for ages they had flourished; but she could not call five francs her own;—she was wholly dependant on the kindness of her cousin and godmother, Mademoiselle de Janson, who, as the daughter of an elder branch, was sole mistress of all that remained of the once splendid patrimony of the Courcelles. Their name, an empty inheritance in modern France, was all Adèle possessed.

Mademoiselle de Janson had taken charge of the little orphan, and reared her; but as the world was going away, she had spent little on her education. It would have been foolish; and as the world was going away, where was the use of caring for anything in it? Adèle had grown up as she pleased, untaught, unloved, unchecked, and unheeded, and yet happy in her solitary liberty. Even as a wild flower blooms none the less sweetly than the garden blossom, for springing from the stone and growing amongst weeds; so, to all seeming, even though neglected from her childhood—even though not surrounded by love and kindness from her birth—Adèle flourished as gaily and as happily in the shade, as others in the sun.

To live—to be—to exist—was sufficient, to the last of the De Courcelles. She cared for nothing—not even for herself. Temper, character, story, she as yet had not.

Jeannette was the first to speak again.

“When I was a girl,” she said, with a sigh, “I remember seeing the spinning-wheel of Madame la Marquise de Courcelles. It was pure ivory, inlaid with gold.”

“Was it?” carelessly said Adèle.

“She was your great grandmother,” pursued Jeannette, with another sigh.

Adèle said nothing, but pulled out a blade of grass that grew in a split of the stone step on which she sat, and examined it curiously.

“She was called Adèle, like you,” continued Jeannette. “A

handsome lady she was ; and fine old times were those. Dozens of servants about the house—cooks, scullions, butlers, gardeners, and what not. There was not a stone wrong in the whole manor ; there was not a weed in the whole garden. Sad changes, Mamselle Adèle, sad times."

"I dare say it is all for the best," philosophically said Adèle ; and throwing away her blade of grass, she skipped down the steps, passed by Jeannette with a nod, and ran, swift and light as a deer, along the sunny path.

Everywhere around her she saw ruin and decay, but she heeded them not. The hedges might run wild, the fountains might cease to play, the statues might be defaced or broken—little mattered it to the careless girl, whilst she had space, air, and liberty. And none of your modern mock gardens, that would fit in a drawing-room, with a space to walk around, was the garden of Courcelles. It was vast as a park, a sort of provincial Versailles, once famous in its day. The varied and uneven nature of the ground had with great difficulty been overcome by the obscure Le Notre, who designed alley, bosquet and parterre, and adorned every walk with its statues, and every arbour with its fountains ;—but it had been overcome—and the result was a civilized garden in the very bosom of nature ; around it wild hills, clothed with murmuring pine-trees ; and at its feet a silent lake, on which the very wind reposed, so deep and fast seemed its enchanted sleep.

That little and wild mountain-lake was one of the few friends which the solitary youth of Adèle had known, and she never passed it by without giving it a look. Bending over the broken stone balustrade, adorned with vases, where roses and geraniums still bloomed, she now gazed down dreamily. With a low splash the clear green waters washed a flight of white steps leading to the garden—and every time they retreated they left bare and shining the broken stone, to which heavy wet mosses clung. How slow had crept the lazy sunbeams on that smooth, glassy surface. How chill and deep was the dark bed on which the pebbles slept below. And Adèle knew them all ; and as long as she could remember, she had seen them lying there, visible and distinct, yet beyond reach of the rudest storm above. But she gave them no more than one look now. The sun was hot, and she longed for shade. She turned to her left, walked on through broad straight alleys, until she reached the boundary of this forsaken garden,—a high trellis, veiled by boxwood, and behind which she entered into a grassy orchard, full of shade and sun-

shine. Scattered trees bent to the very earth their fruit-laden boughs,—hidden in their dark branches birds sang their last song; the blackbird and the speckled thrush leaped along, or ran lightly in the high grass; bees hummed around their sunny hive, and on an old brown wall, which enclosed this pleasant little spot, ripened peaches of rich mellow bloom. At once Adèle stretched forth her hand, plucked the ripest, and sat down in the grass to eat it. It had all the exquisite flavour and melting lusciousness of that delicious fruit, and it satisfied even an epicure of sixteen. As she threw away the stone, Adèle indolently sank down in the high grass, which closed over her.

Above her spread the green branches of an apple-tree, partly shading her from the sun, and partly revealing broad gaps of blue sky. Near her a little brook ran sparkling through the grass, rippling on a few grey stones with a broken murmur. The warmth and peace of noonday enclosed this quiet place, and Adèle lay in the grass, happy, like any careless and wild young thing. Suddenly, and as a bird breaks out into song, she began to sing a long, monotonous, and ancient ballad, which had not yet died away from the memories of men in this retired province; and as she sang, she thought, "Oh, no! the world is not going away; it is coming, coming fast."

CHAPTER III.

TIDINGS.

"SAD changes and sad times," thought Jeannette, as she sat spinning in the sun. She looked at the grey old manor frowning above her, at the lonely and ruined garden, and remembering poor little Adèle, she sighed.

"And how is our good old Jeannette to-day?" asked a soft, sleek voice close by her.

He who spoke thus was a low-built young man, with a slouching shoulder, a halting gait, and a broad sallow face, free from expression.

No sooner did she hear and see this unprepossessing individual, whom we may as well introduce at once as M. François Morel, foreman, clerk, factotum of the forge, than an expression of min-

gled disdain and wrath flashed over Jeannette's brown visage. But she shut her lips tight, like one resolved not to speak, and spun twice as fast as before.

"And did Jeannette, who is so good and so kind, give our letter to Mademoiselle Adèle?" asked Monsieur Morel, chuckling complacently.

"Yes, sir; yes, sir," replied Jeannette, with a sort of gasp, to which she was subject when labouring under strong and repressed emotion, "yes, sir; Mamzelle Jeannette—who is not good old Jeannette, sir—Mamzelle Jeannette did, I say, give that letter, and here is your answer, sir."

She drew from her pocket a letter, somewhat soiled and creased by its sojourn there, and disdainfully jerked it on the end of the bench on which she sat.

The little Chinese eyes of M. Morel sparkled with pleasure. He stretched out his eager hand, and snatched up the letter; but no sooner had he glanced at the name written on the back, and recognized his own official round-hand, than his countenance fell. He next examined the seal, and saw that it had not been broken. For a while, he held the letter in his hand looking at it, then he coolly took from his pocket a piece of whitey-brown paper, carefully wrapped up the letter in it, then put it, thus wrapped, in a larger and somewhat greasy pocket-book, which, after clasping carefully, he returned to the place whence it had issued—a deep side pocket.

"So she returns it unread," he said, looking up and smiling in Jeannette's face. "She had better have read it, Mamzelle Jeannette. She had better have read it. And what is more, she shall read it some day—not now perhaps, but some day or other, Mamzelle Jeannette."

"Oh! you threaten her, do you, you mean sneaking fellow!" screamed Jeannette, turning pale with fury. "You, you," she added, gasping again; "you the son of a peasant, of a valet, to think of writing love letters to Mamzelle de Courcelles; to dream of—of marrying—marrying her!"

M. Morel raised his eyebrows with seeming surprise, and put out his nether lip with great apparent disdain of the fact these words suggested.

"Marry—a little beggar like that," he said, "who has not even five sous in her purse, like the wandering Jew! and who told you I ever wanted to marry her, or that this letter was a love-letter? Marry her, indeed. No, no, Mamzelle Jeannette; I hope I can do better than that."

The cold, cruel disdain of this speech stung Jeannette. She looked about her for some offensive missile, and finding nothing better than a pail of water, she caught hold of it, and unhesitatingly flung its contents at the head of the offender.

M. Morel, guessing her kind intentions, stepped back, but so hastily that his foot tripped against a stone; he fell flat on his back, and in this prostrate condition was deluged from head to foot. Jeannette laughed until the tears ran down her cheek; but M. Morel rose white with rage, wiped himself with his pocket handkerchief, then said, his uplifted hand shaking as he spoke:

"Very well, Mamzelle Jeannette, we will remember this too, and enter it in our little book of accounts."

"That for your book of accounts," said Jeannette, snapping her fingers with great scorn; "and if ever you dare to set your feet here again, you shall get something else. Begone, I say," she added, stamping her foot, and her unappeased wrath again rising.

"I shall go, because I choose to go," deliberately replied M. Morel, turning away, "and I shall come here to-morrow, or after to-morrow, if I like."

"Through the key-hole of the great door?" sarcastically asked Jeannette, who was portress.

"Through the great door itself," calmly replied M. Morel. "Good morning, Mamzelle Jeannette." He bowed with ironical politeness, and left as he had come.

Jeannette resumed her spinning, and broke her thread five times successively, and forgot to note that this was a sign of calamity or death. Her brow was knit, her eyes were fixed, her lips tightly compressed.

"What can the wretch mean?" she soliloquized aloud.

"What wretch, Mamzelle Jeannette?" asked a quavering voice at her elbow.

This time the speaker was a gaunt, white-headed old servant-man, in a striped waistcoat, and loose pantaloons which he was always hitching; with strong features, deep wrinkles, and a long ungainly body, that seemed no little trouble to its owner, for he was ever shifting it restlessly from one side to the other, like a burden he could not get rid of.

"No one," was Jeannette's tart reply to his question; "gentlemen should not listen, Monsieur Jean."

"Then ladies should not speak their thoughts aloud," returned Jean, leaning on an old garden rake, and leering at Jeannette with evident affection.

A twenty years' flirtation was going on between this ancient

pair. In the world people generally tire of this pastime at the end of a few months; but the longer they carried on, the better did Jean and Jeannette like it, perhaps because it never brought them any nearer to that end of all flirtation—marriage.

Honi soit qui mal y pense. We need not say that in feeling, speech or action, Jean never went beyond the most delicate gallantry, nor Jeannette beyond the most prudish and maidenly reserve. Slander, herself, had respected their ancient loves; she had sneered, indeed, but she had not dared to belie.

But Jeannette was not now in the mood for repartee. She shook her head, heaved a sigh, and at length observed :

"Monsieur Jean, I want to speak to you; well, you need not come and sit by me for that," she added, snappishly, as, in the simplicity of his heart, Jean did indeed think of seating himself on the end of the bench honoured with bearing her weight. "I do not see," she stiffly resumed, "any necessity for it."

"It might have been a pleasure," replied Jean, with tender reproach.

Regardless of his feelings, Jeannette obdurately returned :

"Pleasure, indeed. We are talking of business, Jean. Things," she added, pushing her wheel away with her foot, and folding her arms across her black boddice; "things are not going on well at all."

"Very true, Mamzelle Jeannette."

"And how do you know? If I say it, I know it; that wretch Morel has had the insolence to give me a love-letter."

"A love-letter to you!" interrupted Jean, bouncing and becoming as red as a turkey-cock.

"Ah! bah, it was not for me," she pursued, yet she reddened a little. "No, no; Monsieur Morel flies at higher game, I can tell you. Bless you, the letter was for Mamzelle Adèle."

Jean stared incredulously.

"I have seen it coming a long time," resumed Jeannette. "She cannot endure Monsieur Morel, and just for that reason she is always very civil to him, and the wretch took her civility for fondness. Well, well, I knew we were fallen; but I did not know we were quite so low as all that. However, I took patience, put his letter in my pocket, and said I would give it. Now I did not do so for two reasons; one was, that I would as soon put my right hand in the fire as trouble the poor child with this abominable business; the other reason is, that I know Mademoiselle Adèle to be no better than a little Jacobin."

"Too true," sighed Jean.

"All that I have done, all that Mademoiselle de Janson has done, has failed in putting in her one atom of proper pride."

"Very sad," murmured Jean.

"Knowing this, and knowing that, instead of crushing the low fellow with a look, she would try to console him or pity him, and treat him as if he were her equal, I felt I could not trust her."

"Quite proper—quite."

"Yes, Monsieur Jean; but by letting him think that she returns his letter unread, I may have done some harm. He looked spiteful."

"Let him."

"And a pail of water I threw in his face may not make him feel better-tempered. He left me with an odd threat."

Jean looked interrogative, whereupon Jeannette repeated, word for word, the close of her conversation with M. François Morel.

Jean made light of it, but did not succeed in setting her uneasiness at rest.

"I tell you, the wretch meant something," she persisted. "I have it," she cried, starting to her feet and slapping her brown forehead, "I have it—I tell you the English are coming."

"Coming!" ejaculated Jean; "we are not, thank Heaven, at war, Mamzelle Jeannette, and the last time the English came as allies of our legitimate sovereign Louis."

"Ah, bah!" interrupted Jeannette impatiently; "do you not understand me, Monsieur Jean?—I mean the English of the Forge, the blacksmiths," she added with intense scorn.

"Not unlikely, Mamzelle Jeannette! not unlikely!" said Jean, swaying his long body to and fro; "indeed, very likely."

"Holy Virgin!" cried Jeannette, sinking down on the bench, and raising her hands above her head, "what shall we do?"

"Come, come, Mamzelle Jeannette, there is a remedy to every evil," kindly said Jean; and unchecked this time, he sat down by her side, and did his best to comfort her.

Jeannette's distress requires explanation.

The Manor, garden, and orchard of Courcelles were the property of Mademoiselle de Janson, but they had been let, along with the land on which the forge was built, to the late Mr. Osborne. Mademoiselle de Janson had, indeed, reserved for her own use a few rooms in the farthest wing of the manor, which could with ease have accommodated half-a-dozen modern families. That wing, however, having, for want of proper repair, become decayed and uninhabitable, she had, in the absence of Mr. Osborne and his family, who seldom or never visited Courcelles, em-

igrated to another and more comfortable part of the dwelling, but one to which she had no real right. That her mistress should be caught trespassing by her hated English tenants, was the thought that now haunted Jeannette. She did not lose time in pondering over it; regardless of the slow and plausible arguments of her ancient admirer, who proved to her all sorts of impossible things, Jeannette again started to her feet, and leaving him there, she darted through the door across the court and through the other door, until she reached the presence of Mademoiselle de Janson.

"That girl was always hasty," said Jean, nettled at being thus forsaken; "always."

Mademoiselle de Janson was not alone; near her chair, her hand leaning on the back of it, stood a tall and handsome lady of twenty-five, or twenty-six years at the utmost, a handsome and dark woman, with black hair, soft hazel eyes, straight, regular features, and a gentle though grave countenance.

At once Jeannette recognised Madame Lascours, the wife of an old and wealthy manufacturer, who lived across the narrow lake near which the Manor of Courcelles was built. On hearing the door of the old Hall open, Madame Lascours slowly turned round, and raising her forefinger, she silently warned Jeannette not to enter.

The old servant withdrew on tiptoe, but not before perceiving that the face of Mademoiselle de Janson was buried in her hands. Anxious and uneasy, she remained outside the closed door, and sat down on the last of the oak steps of the massive staircase that led to the upper apartments; there she waited and listened for a long while, during which the Hall remained silent as a grave. At length the door opened, and Madame Lascours came forth, and merely saying, "You may go in to your mistress, Jeannette," she inquired after Adèle, and on hearing that she was in the garden, went to seek her there, whilst Jeannette, burning with curiosity, to say the truth, again sought the presence of Mademoiselle de Janson. But Mademoiselle de Janson was precisely as usual, fantastic, capricious, wayward, neither in nor out of temper, but something between both. Jeannette's declaration that the English were coming, she received with great indifference.

"Let them come," she said, and her little mouth indulged in a most unromantic yawn.

"But, Madame!" exclaimed Jeannette, "I fancy, from what Morel said, that they may come to-morrow."

"Let them come by all means," was the impatient answer.

"And the rooms?" hesitatingly suggested Jeannette.

"Rooms! what rooms?" haughtily asked her mistress; then in a cool and distant tone she added, "Jeannette, you are a fool! did you for a moment imagine I was here without the knowledge of the late Mr. Osborne?"

"Late! Holy Virgin! is he dead?"

"Of course he is—why should he not die?—We all must die. Why should not he?—He died a fortnight back in England, and I dare say his son is coming to take possession. What about it all, Jeannette?"

And sitting back in her chair, Mademoiselle de Janson balanced one of her little feet up and down, and superciliously looked at Jeannette through her half-shut eyes; and as she saw that Jeannette stared at her in evident bewilderment, she added, with a royal wave of the hand—

"You may go, Jeannette."

And Jeannette, thoroughly disconcerted by the coolness and strange manner of her mistress, withdrew.

Madame Lascours slowly walked through the old garden until she reached the orchard; there she paused, looking in vain for Adèle. At length she caught sight of some dark object, partly visible through the grass; she drew nearer, and found the young girl lying under the apple-tree, coiled round like a spaniel, and fast asleep. Madame Lascours was too well acquainted with the wild habits of Adèle to be much surprised; yet she half smiled as she looked down at her. In passing through the garden she had plucked a twig of luxuriant box-wood,—she now dropped it on the young girl's face. Adèle started up, awake at once.

"Alice, Alice!" she cried, joyfully throwing her arms around the neck of her friend, and embracing her with eager warmth—"Oh! I am so glad! I am so glad!"

She laughed in the fulness of her joy, and her blue eyes sparkled with delight.

One was but a girl, and the other was a woman,—a woman, too, older and sadder than her years; they met rarely, and never for any length of time; their tempers, their very natures differed; their position had no more in common than had their daily life; yet strong love bound them,—love all the stronger, perhaps, because it could not be easily indulged.

M. Lascours was old and eccentric; he covered his wife with jewels; he clothed her in the richest of attire; he indulged her

every wish ; but though she was young, beautiful, and gentle, he seemed restless and unhappy, and Alice looked grave and sad. They had been married seven years ; but their union was childless, and they lived in solitary state and cheerless splendour, in a modern and luxurious villa, of which Adèle had never crossed the threshold. Its master had never asked her to do so ; and Adèle, all the prouder that she was so poor, would not go unasked. She did not know that he was scarcely conscious of her existence ; she could not guess the strange and sad reserve in which he and his young bride lived ; a reserve which did not prevent affection and strong esteem on either side, and for which there existed two sufficient reasons,—misanthropic sensitiveness on the part of the husband, and excess of submission on that of the wife. He was too proud to say to her—"Love me, and be frank and happy ;" and she was too anxious to forestall his least wishes, to guess that he would have wished, above all, to see in her the free and fearless bearing of a happy woman. And thus they went on, not estranged nor yet united.

For some reason or other, Madame Lascours imagined that her husband would not see Adèle with pleasure, and thus she never ventured to ask the young girl to come and see her. Indeed, it seemed tacitly agreed between the two friends that this subject should never even be alluded to between them, and it never was.

"This is a pretty place," said Madame Lascours, looking around the green and sunny orchard, and something like sadness passed over her whole countenance, and lingered in her soft hazel eyes.

"Come, and look at my peaches," enthusiastically said Adèle, passing her arm within that of her friend.

Madame Lascours shook her head.

"Not to-day," she replied, with a sigh, "not to-day." And she led the way back through the garden.

"Sit down here," said Adèle, leading her to an old broken bench that stood in a ruined arbour, facing a dilapidated fountain. Madame Lascours looked irresolute, but, after a moment's pause, she turned away.

"Not here, not to-day," she said. For a few minutes she walked on quickly, then she slackened her pace, and went lingeringly up the sunny avenue. Adèle, too impatient for that slow progress, darted around her, gathering flowers, plucking weeds, binding up the hedge, and, above all, talking, whilst Madame Lascours said not one word, but looked around her in sad silence

At length they reached the quiet court, and there Madame Lascours paused, and said, with some emotion, "I thought to tell you in the orchard, then in the garden, but my heart failed me, and I now must tell you here—Adèle, I shall come and see you no more."

"No more!" exclaimed Adèle, turning slightly pale, "and why so?"

"Because—because the Osborne's are coming," said Madame Lascours, in a low tone; "my husband does not like them; he would say nothing; he never does say anything; but he might not like it.—I must not come."

"Poor Alice!" said Adèle, unable to repress the compassionate ejaculation.

"No, no, you must not pity me," eagerly said Madame Lascours, and reddening a little; "you do not understand the case at all; you do not understand my husband; he is peculiar—very peculiar; but he is the best and most generous of men."

"Are you happy?" bluntly asked Adèle.

"As happy as a man who is not happy himself can make me," replied Madame Lascours.

Adèle had passed her arm within that of her friend, and as they spoke, they paced the narrow court up and down.

"Alice, how did you ever make up your mind to marry a man so very much older than yourself?" asked the young girl, for the first time touching on this delicate subject.

Twice they walked as far as the old wall, and twice came back to a low, grass-grown door facing it, before Madame Lascours seemed able to answer that question. At length, she said—

"I was not consulted, Adèle. Monsieur Lascours was rich; we were very poor. He asked my mother, but she did not ask me."

"But the mayor asked you, and the priest asked you?" objected Adèle, opening her eyes, and seeming amazed; "why did you not say no, instead of saying yes?"

An expression of deep discouragement passed over the handsome face of Madame Lascours. She bowed her head and sighed.

"Adèle," she said, "no mother would tell you, 'child, you are to marry Monsieur so and so, on such a day;' for though you are little and childish, and though you look careless and light, there is firm purpose in you—purpose and inexorable will. But I, God help me! I am like the reed, made to bend. I tell

you I was born to yield and obey—to be conquered and ever broken.”

With grave and sad wonder, Adèle heard this confession, and, looking up in the bent face of her friend as she uttered it, she hesitatingly suggested—“Do you not really think, Alice, you could manage to have a will of your own?”

“What should I do with it? Will! I should not know how to use will!”

“Oh, it is quite easy, I assure you,” eagerly replied the young girl; “only try, and you will see.”

Madame Lascours kindly looked down in the face of her little friend.

“Have you ever hesitated about any thing in your little life?” she asked.

“Of course I have. When the pedlar came this spring, I hesitated a good deal between a pink muslin and a blue one.”

“Did you really? And pray for how long?”

“Ten minutes.”

“Amazing! well, I should hesitate ten days, ten months and ten years if you like, and never know which I liked best; the pink or the blue. Nay, more, whichever I chose I should find ten reasons at least for regretting that I had not chosen the other, and I would turn the matter over in my brain until I felt sick and weary of it, and life and everything.”

“Oh! then,” resignedly said Adèle, “you should get some one to choose for you.”

“And is not that what I do, child, when I let others act for me? If I did not do so, I should perplex life away in wondering where my real duty lay, and what path it was God’s will that I should take and follow. I have concluded in my own mind, that when God gives judgment and strong will, he means both to be exercised; but that when either one or the other fails, the only safe way left to serve Him is obedience. I have obeyed my mother, I now obey my husband, and humbly do I hope that in so doing I fulfil the daily petition we all utter: ‘Thy will be done.’”

She spoke low, perhaps because, spite her resignation, it might sadden her to acknowledge how far her will failed to shape and guide her life, perhaps because she dreaded being overheard from any of the windows that overlooked the court which they still paced up and down. Adèle did not seem to heed or hear her, for she came back to the old argument.

"Alice, I assure you it is not difficult at all. You have only to desire a thing very much."

"And what if I cannot? What if some cannot desire?" interrupted Madame Lascours, with a sad smile. "What if Desire, which is Will's twin sister, belong to a certain warmth of heart and fulness of being not granted to me? Where then is the remedy? But we must not talk metaphysics," she observed, changing the subject of discourse, and evidently not inclined to renew it. "I know not how I came to talk so much about myself. Besides, we are both forgetting to say what must be said: Good bye."

She stopped short as she spoke, and laying her hand on the shoulder of Adèle, she looked down sadly in her face. Somewhat wistfully Adèle returned the look. In spite of all Madame Lascours had said, the young girl still did not understand her friend; so foreign were this helpless weakness and unconditional submission to her free and decisive temper. But she kept her wonder to herself, and merely observed:

"Good bye then, Alice; I saw you once every three months—when am I to see you now?"

This question Madame Lascours did not answer. She gave one sad, very sad look around the court, then sighed, passed underneath the porch, crossed the wide hall, and only paused when she reached the front gate, which Adèle reluctantly opened.

The bright, vivid landscape of mountain and sky, with a quiet lake asleep and glittering in the sun, suddenly flashed before them. An avenue of trees once led from the Manor to the margin of the lake, but it had long since vanished, and the rude old dwelling now rose alone and unsheltered, exposed to every blast of the passing winds.

"Do you see those two large moss-grown stumps?" said Madame Lascours to her young companion. "They were stately trees when I was a child—centuries old, tradition said."

"That was long ago, before my time," gravely answered Adèle; "and do you know, Alice, I like the Manor best as it is, half ruined, without trees, without avenue, a grey, old dwelling. There is not a window but the sun gets in through it, and makes the stone rooms warm and pleasant. There is not a cranny but some wild weed or wilder flower grows in it. A fig then for the cold and gloomy times when trees shut out the sun, and neither weed nor wild flower had room to grow."

"Good bye," said Alice; "come no farther; your cousin might not like it. And before I go, let me say a few words: my

husband is kind, very kind. If ever you need me, do not wait to send; come yourself at once; indeed, never send for me: Come."

She stooped, kissed the young girl's cheek, then lowered her veil, and quickly walked down to the water's edge. Adèle stood looking until she saw her enter a boat, which swiftly shot across the lake. She then re-entered the house, closed the door, and went back to the garden; but in passing through the court she paused a moment. For the first time the shadow of the spot fell on her young heart.

From that day she never crossed the place, but the sad and handsome face of Alice seemed to rise before her, and she never remembered her friend, but the cloister-like gloom of the solitary court which had heard her melancholy confessions, seemed to surround her.

CHAPTER IV.

THE TRAVELLER.

Rude and wild, yet not without beauty, is that part of France which stretches from the deep fastnesses of the Jura to the rich vineyards of sunny Burgundy. It is a land of many hills, and pastoral valleys, in which countless flocks feed in peace; of forest-covered mountains, yielding stone and iron, more precious than gold to man; of rapid young rivers, whose rushing waters feed a thousand clattering mills; a land where the wildness of the desert, and the commerce of the city, meet in peace beneath nature's smile.

The sun was setting, as Mr. Osborne reached one of the wildest spots of this wild district. The carriage-road ended with the little town of Angeville. There Mr. Osborne had left his luggage, and ridden on alone, through a narrow valley, that shortened his journey a full half-day. He had not re-entered the road more than ten minutes, when a sudden turning brought him within view of a little mountain-lake. He reined in his horse, and stood still. Behind and before him stretched hills and their valleys, seen vague and dim in the mild light of grey evening. The wheels of factories and of mills were at rest; but there was a sound of the rushing of streams coming down from rocky heights, and a low murmur, as of the wind, passing high in the air above

them. Below the road lay the lake. It looked both cool and deep. Its still waters, clear and green as emerald, wound away in the shadow of steep mountains. A thousand feet and more they rose above it; blue mists, softly curling at their feet to lie and sleep there until the coming of the morn, whilst across their pine-clad peaks swiftly passed the sunset's burning glow.

As Mr. Osborne stood looking at and admiring a scene both wild and beautiful, the sound of the evening bell rose from the little belfry of a white church standing across the lake. In Italy, this pious and beautiful custom is called the Ave Maria; in France it is known as the "Angelus," from the first word of the prayer, which, on hearing it, the faithful repeat,—the prayer uttered evening after evening by thousands of hearts, to commemorate for ever the wonderful tidings which "the angel of the Lord declared unto Mary."

The sound thrilled through his very heart. It recalled the Ave Maria of his beloved south. The wide Campagna, growing purple and dark beneath the pale starry sky, again spread before him; he beheld once more the azure seas of the Neapolitan shores, with those islands, around which the charm of the syren for ever lingers; then the bright vision suddenly vanished, and he saw himself in a French valley as rude and wild as any nook of northern scenery in his own land. He slowly rode on; gloom gathered around his path; the brightness passed from the mountains to the sky, where the last rosy flush soon faded away into space. Above the lake the cry of a bird, wild and melancholy like that of the plover, suddenly broke, waking into life the dead-like stillness of the spot, but as abruptly died away. The farther the journeyer rode on, the wilder grew the scenery around him. At length he began to wonder whether he would soon reach, or whether he had unwittingly passed, the place of his destination—Courcelles. He looked around him with a glance that searched far into the deepening obscurity. The lake still lay to his right, on his left stretched a rugged valley, dark with rustling pines, but human home or dwelling he saw not. "I must have passed it," he thought; but scarcely had he inwardly uttered the words, when he was suddenly dazzled by the ruddy and vivid glow of an open forge blazing at some distance before him, but which a projecting rock had until then completely concealed from his view. He pricked his jaded horse and rode on; the road was narrow and dark, and the very brightness of the forge seemed to render it darker; and thus it came to pass, that what with his haste, and what with the darkness, Mr. Osborne rode

straight against a peaceable individual, who was quietly walking from the forge towards him, and knocked him down. An energetic oath assured him that the sufferer was not killed ; he therefore calmly inquired with what the vivacious French have called *le flegme Britannique*.

"Have I hurt you ?"

"Hurt me !" exclaimed, with a sort of scream, the injured one, rising and indulging in a volley of fresh oaths ; "you knock me down, and you say, 'Have I hurt you ?' Perhaps you have, a little."

"I am sorry for it," drily said Mr. Osborne—and his tone was as even as if he had said, "I am glad." He could not see either the face or figure of the man against whom he had unwittingly stumbled, but the very sound of his shrieking, falsetto voice was antipathetic to him, and being very like a woman in his aversions and his likings, Mr. Osborne disliked the owner of that voice from that night and that hour.

That unlucky individual, who was no other, indeed, than M. François Morel, was in his turn struck by a slight foreign accent lurking in the tones of Mr. Osborne, who otherwise spoke French like a Frenchman ; and softening down with amazing rapidity, and changing his voice from its naturally sharp key to the assumed soft sleekness which, through long habit, had become almost as natural to him as his own tones, he inquired, insinuatingly,—

"Will Monsieur excuse me ? But is not Monsieur—perhaps Monsieur Osborne—whom we are all so anxiously expecting at Courcelles ?"

"All !" exclaimed Mr. Osborne, "are they come, then ?"

"No one has arrived as yet," eagerly replied Morel, "no one excepting Monsieur. But we were fearing lest something had happened to Monsieur ; and indeed, I am afraid that I may have been the unfortunate cause of inflicting some injury on Monsieur, or perhaps on Monsieur's horse ?"

"You are more likely to have been the sufferer," impatiently interrupted Mr. Osborne ; "but who are you ? You seem to belong to the place."

"I am François Morel, Monsieur's foreman, to serve him ; and I had the honour to receive a letter from Monsieur the other day, and of answering it, as, perhaps, Monsieur will have the goodness to remember."

"I recollect it. This, then, is the forge ; I cannot see the Manor."

"Will Monsieur allow me to take the bridle of his horse, and

to lead him to it at once?" eagerly asked the complaisant foreman; "the road has not been mended this year, and is scarcely safe."

This was not true; but though Mr. Osborne could not see that the road was perfectly safe, and therefore could not contradict M. Morel's statement, he declined availing himself of his offer, and alighted at once. M. Morel still zealously volunteered to lead the horse, but his new master coldly declined.

"Then perhaps Monsieur will allow me to show Monsieur the way?" persisted M. Morel.

"Yes—you may do that."

The way was not long; scarcely more than a hundred yards did it extend,—for M. Morel did not lead Mr. Osborne to the front gate, but to a garden-door, which was seldom locked, so wild and desolate had the garden become.

"I will fasten the horse of Monsieur to the iron stanchion here," said Morel, "and then I shall have the honour of showing Monsieur the way."

Monsieur did not wait to bestow on him that honour; two years of his youth had been spent in the old Manor—he knew every inch of the ground and every turning of every staircase. Without hesitation he crossed the garden and entered the court. He was ascending the flight of steps that led to the main body of the building, when he was overtaken by Monsieur Morel, who had breathlessly followed on his steps, and now whispered with seeming hesitation—

"May I ask if Monsieur means to sleep here to-night?"

"Why, of course I do! There is some servant or other in charge of the house; is there not?"

M. Morel coughed dubiously; Mr. Osborne reiterated his question.

"Why, the truth is," answered the foreman with great apparent reluctance, "that I forgot to tell Monsieur—hem—that two ladies—hem—and their servants have taken possession of the only good rooms in the Manor."

"Ladies! what ladies?" asked Mr. Osborne very much surprised.

"Did not Monsieur really know? I am sorry that I mentioned—"

"What ladies?" again asked Mr. Osborne, and this time he spoke rather sharply.

"Only Mademoiselle de Janson and her little god-daughter, Sir."

Mr. Osborne impatiently walked up and down the court, and a frown of displeasure, which no one could see, gathered on his brow. He was a sensitive, reserved man; he had come alone to Courcelles, thinking to find there privacy and solitude, and it could not be much to his taste thus to find two ladies unexpectedly established in his home.

"Why did I not know of this earlier?" he asked, stopping short.

"I thought Monsieur knew."

"Is there any inn, or place of entertainment near here?"

"There is a very comfortable inn, indeed, the *Lion d'Argent*, of which the hostess is my particular friend, six leagues off," meekly replied M. Morel; "a very good inn indeed."

"Six leagues! Then there is no help for it; you must present my compliments to Mademoiselle de Janson, and beg of her to excuse me for appearing before her in this state and at this hour; you may add—"

Here, with many excuses for interrupting Monsieur, M. Morel, spite all his previous obsequiousness, now humbly but positively declined delivering this message. There was a coolness, an unfortunate coolness, in the motives of which he would rather not enter, between him and Mademoiselle de Janson; in short, it would not be pleasant for him to intrude on that lady as the bearer of unwelcome tidings, and he must beg, to his infinite regret, to be excused.

"It is not of the least consequence," quietly said Mr. Osborne, surprised, however, at the refusal; "I suppose I can find a servant to deliver the message."

"I am afraid that Monsieur cannot," meekly rejoined M. Morel; "from my knowledge of the habits of the family, I am afraid that Monsieur will have to proceed himself to the Hall, where Mademoiselle de Janson sits every evening."

"Very well," impatiently replied Mr. Osborne. "That can be done."

"And shall I send any one to take charge of Monsieur's horse?"

"You will oblige me by doing so."

"And shall I come and take Monsieur's orders to-morrow morning?" inquired M. Morel.

"By all means."

"Then I have the honour to bid Monsieur a very good night."

And with a deep bow, M. Morel took his leave.

"I shall detest that man," thought Mr. Osborne.

He looked around him.

The moon was slowly rising, and, though not visible, she half filled with gray dawning light the silent court; the other half was still deep in shade. Mr. Osborne took a few turns up and down, absorbed in sad thoughts, of which a few were not merely sad, but bitter. The aspect of the place had summoned them from the depths of the past; like spectres called up from their long sleep, they gathered around him, murmuring in his ear, "Discontented heart, why has thou disturbed us from our repose?"

With an impatient motion of the head he shook them away, and again ascended the flight of steps. A ray of light, and the sound of a voice reading aloud, guided him to a half-open door; he knocked gently, and receiving no reply, he pushed it open, then paused on the threshold and advanced no further. He saw an old Hall, vast and high, with stone walls and dark shadowy roof. On a table apart burned a solitary lamp, and in the vastness of the room it looked like a white and opaque globe of flame; its light contrasted, but did not blend with that of a ruddy wood fire blazing on the hearth of an old chimney of sculptured stone. To the right, a dark oak panel gave back the red and vivid glow; to the left, a range of windows showed, distinct and clear, the sombre outline of mountains on the sky with a quivering star shining above them, far in the blue depths. With a rapid glance, Mr. Osborne embraced these details, even whilst his eye seemed to rest on a group of four persons, who knelt in a circle, and were evidently engaged in repeating the evening prayer. One was a lady no longer young, but still beautiful, who held a heavy missal, from which she read aloud, in a clear and distinct voice; near her knelt a girl, with a still, young face and childish figure, and further on, two old brown and harsh-featured domestics, a man and a woman, completed the picture. The appearance and half entrance of Mr. Osborne did not seem to have produced the least impression on this kneeling group. Still she who read went on. Desiring to be dissolved and to be with Christ; praying for the preservation of the just, for the conversion of the sinner, for mariners at sea, for travellers on their journey, for the weary and the afflicted, for protection through the night, for the guardianship of holy angels, and for guidance to life everlasting, until, closing the book, she added, in a low, faltering voice, the petition which long habit had impressed on her memory, "And may the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace."

"Amen," said the low voice of Adèle, and they all rose.

Mr. Osborne came forward, and Mademoiselle de Janson advanced a few steps towards him. They had met many years before; but she recognized him at once, and did not allow him to utter his name.

"You are William Osborne," she said, as she held out her hand, like one greeting an old friend.

They looked at one another attentively, and rather sadly Mademoiselle de Janson smiled.

"There have been many changes since we met, have there not?" she asked. "Well, 'tis no matter now—is it? Time teaches how to bear all things, and consoles for every sorrow. Adèle, child, bid me good-night and go; and you, Jeannette, see that nothing is wanted in the room I told you to prepare to-day."

Adèle held up her cheek for her godmother to kiss, then quietly left the room; the two servants followed her out, Mademoiselle de Janson and Mr. Osborne remained alone. She pointed to a seat, and sank back pale and languid in her own chair.

"And so," she said after a moment's silence, "you have lost your father. After sacrificing you, as he once sacrificed me, to his commercial ambition, he died. Like the man in the gospel, he has left house and land behind him. The granary in which he husbanded his wheat is full, but where is the master of the harvest? Do not think," she added after a pause, "that I speak in resentment, or in evil triumph. My anger against him was so far dead that I accepted favours from him, else you would not find me here in your house! Now, however, I need not say, that is over. I shall leave to-morrow."

"Not on my account, I hope," said Mr. Osborne, speaking for the first time.

"On your account precisely," replied the lady. "You are too like him; I never could look at you, but the past would rise before me. But that is not my only motive. Of course his widow and his children will come here soon—I need not tell you one roof could never shelter me and that woman."

Mr. Osborne had been pacing the Hall up and down with folded arms and head pensively inclined; he paused before Mademoiselle de Janson's chair, and, with a quiet smile, he said:

"Is it so very hard to forgive a scheming woman?"

"You are a man," passionately exclaimed Mademoiselle de Janson; "you have the world, life, struggles, hardships, ambi-

tions, hopes, everything to help you to forget. I am a woman—that is to say, I may sit by the fireside and brood over the past, until it becomes a living present, for ever torturing and haunting me. I forgive fully, fully to the seventy times seven; but I cannot forget.”

A flush rose to her cheek, then died away until it settled in a bright, burning spot. Mr. Osborne drew his chair close to hers and sat down by her side.

“And if you leave,” he kindly asked, “where do you go?”

“To a convent in Lyons. I went there when she came here five years ago. I shall go early to-morrow; so,” she added, rising, “good night and good bye.”

“Good bye, then, since you will have it so!” said Mr. Osborne. “Is there any wish of yours that I can comply with?”

“None. I am no longer mistress here. Your father paid Jean to attend to the garden, and Jeannette to attend to the house, but they would insist on considering themselves my servants; I dare say you can enter into the feeling, and not wonder much at them.”

“I should rather wonder if they thought otherwise.”

“Then once more good night.”

She gave him her hand; he pressed it with a warmth unusual for him, but the wayward fit had returned to Mademoiselle de Janson, and she looked cold and distant.

“I have a request to make,” she said, formally. “May I trust you will comply with it?”

“Most certainly, if it be in my power.”

“I am not likely to ask you to do anything not in your power. I cannot take with me my cousin and god-daughter, Mademoiselle de Courcelles; she will remain here in some of the rooms which the agreement with your late father made mine. Should Madame Osborne and her daughters choose to see and frequent Adèle, I do not oppose it; it may please her, and it can do her no harm.”

“Rely upon it she shall meet with every attention and courtesy,” said Mr. Osborne, with some warmth.

“Thank you,” very coldly replied Mademoiselle de Janson, “I ask for nothing of the kind. Pray let the ladies act as they like; notice or neglect her, it matters very little. My request concerns your behaviour to her.”

“Mine!” exclaimed Mr. Osborne, much surprised.

“Precisely. And my request is this: whatever you may learn, tell her nothing; she knows nothing. She is a good-

natured, foolish little thing—a mere child, without will, wish, or desire. I wish her to stay so.”

Mr. Osborne looked surprised, but Mademoiselle de Janson entered into no explanation. Again she extended to him her little hand, and with the intimation that Jeannette would do anything for him that he required, she took a majestic leave of Mr. Osborne.

CHAPTER V.

MR. OSBORNE'S SUPPER.

“He is very handsome,” thought Adèle, as she retired; “almost as handsome as the picture of the Knight of Malta, up-stairs.”

We need not say that the young girl thought of Mr. Osborne, with whose appearance she had been much struck. Absorbed in her devotions, she had not perceived him until she rose from her knees; she then saw him enter the room,—a tall, pale, and handsome man, bareheaded, and wrapped in a travelling-cloak; and, as it so chanced, that Mr. Osborne was the first very handsome man, above the class of a peasant, whom the eyes of Adèle had beheld, we must not be surprised that these thoughts occurred to her, as she closed the door of the Hall, and even followed her up-stairs to her room.

It was a favourite axiom with Mademoiselle de Janson, that men and women were not what they had been—an axiom which Adèle could not possibly contradict; for the excellent reason that her experience was limited to men and women present, and did not deal with men and women past. Still, she had doubts, and very strong ones, that Mademoiselle de Janson might be mistaken; and these doubts recurred to her with great force as she sat alone in her room, opposite an old mirror in a tarnished frame. She had begun by thinking Mr. Osborne almost as handsome as the Knight of Malta. She now thought him rather handsomer. Then she wondered—if races did really degenerate—how much handsomer than Mr. Osborne must have been Mr. Osborne's great-grandfather. But though she sat opposite the mirror, and though it reflected a fair young face, and a light young figure, graceful in its attitude of thought and abandon, she never asked herself how much less or more pretty than her venerable great-grandmother was Adèle de Courcelles.

Yet that young lady knew quite well that she was a pretty girl, for Jeannette told her so every day, and even Mademoiselle de Janson, spite the decay of races in general, and of the human species in particular, had several times given her, in the course of her evening lecture, that piece of information ; but somehow or other the subject could not dwell in her thoughts. She was pretty ; she knew it ; and there was an end of the matter for Adèle.

The entrance of Jeannette broke on her speculations ; she burst in, breathless and bewildered.

" Well, what is the matter ? " asked Adèle, with calm surprise. Jeannette wrung her hands and shook her head.

" He—he—wants a supper ! " she at length gasped.

Adèle looked a little startled and dismayed.

" Supper ! " she echoed,— " have you spoken to Marrainne ? "

" She is in her room. "

Now, it was a rule in the little household of Mademoiselle de Janson, that this lady was never, unless in case of fire, to be intruded upon or disturbed.

" And she left you no orders ? "

" None. "

" And what is there in the larder ? "

" Nothing. "

Adèle shook her head, and evidently thought this no light matter.

" And he wants to sup, " pitifully said Jeannette, " and he says he is desperately hungry. "

" Poor fellow ! " compassionately exclaimed Adèle ; " he must eat, Jeannette, " she added, rising and speaking resolutely.

Jeannette looked as if she thought this was more easily said than done. But she was accustomed to yield, in great emergencies, to the superior energy and decision of her young mistress, and she now obediently followed her down stairs.

Amongst the many peculiarities of the lovely Mademoiselle de Janson, there was one which sometimes proved a source of inconvenience to her household. She either forgot to eat herself, or forgot to provide for the eating of others. Apparently it had not occurred to her on the present occasion, either that Mr. Osborne would need some refreshment, or that there was positively nothing to offer him ; for after giving him the lofty intimation that he had only to ask Jeannette for anything he wanted, in order to obtain it, she had retired to her own room, leaving Jeannette to satisfy him as best she might.

Decision, and that quickness which embraces all things in one

rapid glance, now marked the generalship of Adèle. She lightly ran down stairs, proceeded at once to the cold and vacant room, which was Jeannette's pantry, opened the ponderous oaken safe or buffet, and ascertained that, with the exception of two stale loaves, it was really empty.

Adèle folded her arms, and shook her head French fashion.

"The world was made out of nothing," she said, in a mock heroic tone; "but how are we to give Monsieur Osborne a supper out of nothing? Impossible, is it not, eh, Jeannette?" she added, turning towards the old servant.

"I told you so, Mamzelle," was the sorrowful reply.

A merry and triumphant smile curled the rosy lip of Adèle. She put her hand in her pocket and took out a bright two-franc piece.

"You see that, Jeannette," she said, holding it up to the height of Jeannette's eyes; "well, then, take it to widow Catherine, get cream, eggs, and butter, and make one of your own omelets."

"And I shall say," glibly put in Jeannette, "that the ham is spoiled, and that the chickens are too hard for Monsieur."

Adèle reddened; she was not aristocratic or proud, but she had something in her of her ancient blood; for she was too loyal and too true to like a lie. A little haughtily she turned on the old servant, and said, drily,—

"Say nothing, Jeannette. We are poor, and he knows it. And now," she added, more gaily, "make haste, like a good girl—or, rather, no. I shall make the omelet. You go and fetch a bottle of good wine from the cellar; go," she continued, seeing that Jeannette hesitated. "Marrainne gave me a dozen last year; so you see I can dispose of one."

Jeannette shook her head, but obeyed.

The fire was dying away on the hearth of the old Hall; Mr. Osborne seated in Mademoiselle de Janson's chair, watched its fading embers. He was too tired and too hungry for active thought, but not for memory. Images of the past rose before him, not pleasing or lovely, but absorbing; he did not heed the opening door, he did not hear a light footstep cross the floor; he saw and heard nothing until a slender figure stood on the hearth before him; he then looked up and beheld Adèle.

"Your fire is going out," she said, looking straight in his

face with a glance which he liked, for it was open and fearless, and spoke of truth, innocent and strong.

With some curiosity he too looked at her, remembering the warning he had received concerning this little girl, as at first sight she still seemed, but he had not leisure to look long; Adèle turned away from his gaze, knelt on the earth, gathered together the decaying embers, and with her breath fanned them once more into flame. She then rose gravely and turning towards Mr. Osborne, said, very seriously, "How tired you must be!"

Mr. Osborne did not answer at once—her aspect, her manner took him by surprise; she was small as a child, but perfect as a woman; dark and fair, free in speech, modest in look, a creature of contrasts to which native and unsought grace gave harmony.

"She is extremely pretty," he thought, and it was only after a while that he recollected himself sufficiently to reply with a polite acknowledgment that he was rather tired.

"Your supper is coming," continued Adèle, "we can only offer you an omelet with bread and old wine."

Mr. Osborne smiled, and assured her that, hungry as he then was, bread and wine alone would have been most acceptable.

"Oh! but there is an omelet besides," rather jealously observed the young girl, "though I dare say, you are like me—I could eat anything when I am hungry. Why, here is Jeannette!" she added with a start, "and the cloth not laid."

At once she unfolded and spread on the table a snow-white cloth, which she had put on a chair on entering the room. Jeannette saw the act, and turned crimson.

"Mademoiselle, Mademoiselle," she murmured, as she laid down the dish containing the omelet.

"Ah! bah!" said Adèle, shaking her pretty head, "one is neither more nor less for laying a cloth. Here, Jean," she added, turning to the old man, who now appeared bearing on a tray a substantial bottle covered with cobwebs, an ancient crystal glass, and a silver spoon and fork. From him she turned to Mr. Osborne, and said, frankly: "We had nothing else to offer you. I am sorry you had to wait."

Mr. Osborne, who had been watching her nimble and agile motions, with a surprised and pleased glance, assured her, with a smile, that the fare she had so kindly provided, was more than sufficient.

"Well then, good night," she said with a friendly nod, and retiring with Jeannette, she left him alone with the old man.

At the close of a silent and quickly despatched meal, Mr. Osborne rose, and Jean, divining his wishes with French quickness, led him at once to his apartment. Laying down on a small round table, the old-fashioned brass lamp which he held, he inquired, in a doleful voice, if Monsieur wanted anything, and receiving a brief negative reply, he withdrew.

The apartment in which Mr. Osborne thus remained alone, was on the ground floor of the Manor. It was a vast and dreary room of silent aspect; the bed was piled up high, and the long white curtains swept from the lofty ceiling to the dark floor. Shadows lurked in every corner, and reposed around every piece of antiquated furniture; a long dark mirror stood at the further end, and reflected the dull light of the lamp burning dimly. A half-open door showed Mr. Osborne that this melancholy bedroom communicated with some other apartment. He took the lamp, crossed the floor, and entered a simply furnished sitting room. He laid down the lamp, and remembering this apartment, he went and opened a French window which led him to a small terrace or balcony, that in its turn led by a flight of steps to the garden.

The moon hung above a lonely hill; with alluring and irresistible voice she called him forth. We all love Nature, but different is the intensity of our love, different too, its kind. Fitful and ardent was that of William Osborne, for though the only prose he wrote was letter prose, though of poetry he was guiltless, yet he too was a poet, in all save the passionate desire of utterance, the poet's crowning gift. Never could he have been one amongst the great tribe of geniuses that command the age in which they are born, that rule it with iron will, and thrill it with delight, admiration and terror; but he might have been one of those sweet and hidden voices that find their echo in a few human hearts, and are heard and blest for evermore.

But indolence and fastidiousness alike kept him silent. Sufficient was it to him to enjoy the quiet hour, the lovely spot that charm the poet's heart. To others he left both poet's song and poet's fame. And thus on this night, when mountain, lake, and sky wooed him in all their beauty, he troubled not himself to find expression for that which he felt, but heart and soul he surrendered himself to the spell of the place and the hour.

At length the air grew chill, clouds passed across the sky, the moon waxed pale and dim, white, wreathing mists rose from the lake, and turning back, Mr. Osborne took a slow walk around the old garden.

The wind was keen, and he walked within the shelter of the ancient Manor. With regret, he noticed its decay, and scanned the broken windows and sunken roof. A sound of voices soon diverted his attention. He looked, and perceived that they proceeded from one of the lower rooms; its windows owned no shutters, and the light of a lamp burning on the table rendered everything within distinctly visible, whilst a broken pane perfidiously allowed every sound to escape out in the night air. The room was wide, but poorly furnished; the speakers were Jeannette and her young mistress. The old woman sat spinning; Adèle stood opposite her in a musing attitude. Her hands were clasped; her head was bent; her profile was distinct and clear on the background of brown stone behind her. Suddenly she looked up, and spoke—

"He is handsomer than the Knight of Malta, is he not, Jeannette?"

Jeannette was confounded; her wheel paused; her mouth opened.

"Holy Virgin, Mamzelle!" she said, at length, "what can have put such a fancy as that into your head?"

"Fancy! it is no fancy!" coolly replied Adèle, "I am certain of what I say. Did I not look at him? I tell you I did, and that he is very handsome. What shall we give him for breakfast to-morrow, Jeannette?"

"Anything you like, Mamzelle," sharply replied Jeannette, "anything. You have already given him one of your dozen of wine such as there is not in all Burgundy, a dozen that was for your wedding breakfast, as you know very well, Mamzelle. You have spent the little silver you had in buying him eggs and cream."

"How cross you are with the poor gentleman," interrupted Adèle, smiling; "was he not a stranger? must we not practise hospitality, Jeannette?"

"Yes, Mamzelle; but to go and give one of the dozen that was for your wedding day, and which he drank down," says Jean, "as coolly as if it were new milk—"

"I gave him the best I had," again interrupted Adèle, "and I would do it again, Jeannette."

She spoke good-humouredly, but wilfully. Her face was turned towards Mr. Osborne; he looked at it awhile, struck with its delicate outlines and happy serenity; then, not caring to hear more of a discourse which touched on him so closely, he turned away, and passed on.

CHAPTER VI.

FOREWARNINGS.

THE sun was rising bright in his field of blue sky; he touched with orange light many a golden peak, many a skirt of pine forest; whilst he left dark and cool the narrow valleys, and did not melt a breath of the blue mists that wandered above the silent lake. With calm delight, Mr. Osborne stood and gazed from the balcony of his sitting-room. The sound of an opening door made him look round. It was Jean bringing in his breakfast.

"You will not forget, Jean!" whispered a soft, light voice in the passage.

Mr. Osborne smiled: his little hostess had been busy again. The breakfast was good, though plain. Mr. Osborne poured out his coffee.

"If Monsieur wishes to breakfast *à la fourchette* later," observed Jean, raising his voice so that his words could be heard outside through the half-open door, "he will have the goodness to say so. There is still some wine in the cellar," hesitatingly added Jean.

"I never take but two meals a day," answered Mr. Osborne.

"As Monsieur pleases."

"You may go."

Jean left.

"Poor little thing!" thought Mr. Osborne, "she would actually have given me another bottle of her wine."

His frugal meal was nearly over, when the sound of voices shrilly screaming made him walk across the room to a window that overlooked the court.

A slim, sunburnt pedlar, with yellow moustache, jaunty cap, and blue blouse, was spreading his wares on the stone steps of the porch, and he was holding with Jeannette one of those shrill, bargaining discussions to which the rapidity of speech, the impressive earnestness of gesture, and the vehement manner of the actors, give a dramatic character in the south, which in the north degenerates into coarseness and vulgarity.

"That—that—for twenty-five sous!" said the pedlar, flourishing aloft a red and yellow handkerchief, "have you no conscience?"

"Plenty!" stontly said Jeannette.

"And you want it for twenty-five sous?"

"Of course I do, Monsieur Pierre."

Monsieur Pierre turned up his eyes and stamped his feet, folding up the handkerchief the while, in order to put it away. Then suddenly seeming to alter his resolve, he thrust it in her hand, and with a melodramatic tone and gesture, he said, "Take it."

"To be sure I shall; you are glad enough to give it too."

Monsieur Pierre rolled his eyes and knit his brow; then, as if by magic, he smoothed his aspect. He had perceived Adèle, who stood smiling in the half gloom of the passage, and courteously, as any knight of old, did Monsieur Pierre doff his cap.

"Good morning, Monsieur Pierre," said the young girl, "I am not going to buy, you know, I have no money. I am only going to look."

"And I would rather have the looks of a pretty young lady like you," chivalrously replied Monsieur Pierre, smoothing his yellow moustache, "than the money of others; so look away, Mademoiselle."

Without heeding the compliment, Adèle availed herself of the permission. Mr. Osborne saw her kneel on the stone flags, and scan with a curious eye the rustic treasures of Monsieur Pierre. He watched her closely; but though she surveyed admiringly the knives, scissors, thimbles, handkerchiefs of every hue, and scarfs and shawls to match that lay before her, no lurking desire to possess any of them seemed to blend with her admiration. Her freely-expressed enthusiasm flattered the pedlar, who looked on graciously.

"Monsieur Pierre," continued Adèle, "I am not going to buy, but I should like to know the price of a few things. What may this blue scarf cost?"

"Ah! that blue scarf," began Monsieur Pierre, smiling happily; "that lovely blue scarf?"

"I would not give the five sous in the Wandering Jew's purse for it," cried Jeannette, "trashy thing! I hope Mademoiselle does not dream of wasting her money upon it."

"Money!" exclaimed Adèle, laughing gaily, "why, you know I have no money."

"Mademoiselle will give you handsomer things any day," cried Jeannette, endeavouring, by the loudness of her voice, to drown the imprudent confession.

"Cousine never gives me anything," impatiently said Adèle, who detested lies of any sort.

"She will bring you a handsome silk dress from Lyons," persisted Jeannette.

"Will she!" ironically observed Monsieur Pierre, who knew how much chance Adèle had of a silk dress. "Well, ladies, good morning; I wish you joy of all the handsome things the other lady will bring you from Lyons."

He had been gathering his wares, he now shouldered his pack, and with a familiar and ironical nod he took his leave.

"Insolent little jackanapes!" indignantly muttered Jeannette.

Adèle laughed gaily.

"As if I cared a pin for anything he has got in his pack," she said.

She spoke in a tone of perfect sincerity, and spoke as she felt: a careless indifference to all that youth most covets, characterized her. She seemed unable to fill the past with regrets or the future with wishes. She took the present as it was, and rejoiced in it like a bird in sunshine, caring as little for the day that is gone, as for the day that is yet to come; a state of mind that ever provoked and perplexed Jeannette. "There is no making out that girl," she muttered going away.

Adèle sat down on the last of the stone steps where the wares of Monsieur Pierre had been displayed, and unconscious of the vicinity and observation of Mr. Osborne, she took her work from her pocket and began to sew. She sat in the cool morning shadow of the court, enclosed with the grim stone of ages, but a golden sunbeam stole down the old wall, lit up a tuft of grass, and came down with a warm glow on her brown head, and played with changing light on her clear cheek. Her downcast eyes, the serious grace of her childish features, her naïve attitude, the pure colouring of her young face, and the stern background of grey stone, and solemn gloom of the place, made a fresh and charming picture, on which Mr. Osborne's artist eye rested with vague pleasure.

"Mademoiselle has dropped this," said Jean, coming out from beneath the porch.

He stood before her, swaying his awkward body to and fro, and turning round a small morocco case, which he at length handed to her.

"It is not mine," she began. She said no more, but uttered a cry of wonder and admiration. Her nimble fingers had touched some secret spring, the case had flown open, and the young girl was dazzled by the sight of a gold thimble, bodkin, and needle-

case, exquisitely worked, and enclosed in a second case of ivory.

"The very handle of the scissors is of gold," she cried; "oh, how beautiful!"

At once she put the thimble on her finger, and holding it up, she surveyed it admiringly.

"Look, Jeannette," she cried to the old woman, who now made her appearance; "look, did you ever see anything so beautiful? I did not think there was anything like it out of a fairy tale."

"Ah, bah!" said Jeannette, shrivelling up her nose, "what is it to the wheel of Madame la Marquise de Courcelles, your great grandmother, all inlaid with gold?"

"Well, but I have not seen the wheel of my great grandmother, and I have seen this. It must be Pierre who dropped it; run after him, Jean,—run!"

She hastily took off the thimble from her finger, and replacing it in the case, she put the case in his hands, with another quick and imperative injunction to run after the pedlar. Jean vanished, for to hear was to obey.

"Ah, how beautiful!" cried Adèle, clasping her hands.

"Ah, bah!" said Jeannette, "a thing that would fit in the hollow of my hand. Ah! if it were a large rolling wheel!"

"And I tell you," said Adèle, looking very much provoked, "that the wheel of my great grandmother was nothing to it."

Jeannette drew herself up stiffly.

"There was never anything like the the wheel of Madame la Marquise, Adèle de Courcelles," she said; "it was presented to her by his Majesty Louis XV., the beloved."

"I do not care about kings," democratically said Adèle.

"Nor about a gold thimble either," replied Jeannette; "you care about nothing, Mademoiselle: your old silver thimble, your steel bodkin, your worn-out scissors, please you just as well."

"No, they do not," shortly said Adèle; "I would give anything for a beautiful thing like that. I should work twice as well with it."

"Ah!" said Jeannette, turning up her eyes with doleful triumph, "if the old place were only what it was; if the old family——"

"Oh, how tiresome you are to-day!" interrupted Adèle; "I like the old place as it is; and as I am the old family now, and am pleased with my lot, what need you care?"

No doubt Jeannette could have given this speech its answer,

but Adèle had darted away across the court, beneath the arched doorway, into the garden, before Jeannette had time to open her mouth.

"She is very up and down to-day," thought Jeannette, "very." She paused, even in her thoughts; she saw Mr. Osborne standing in his window. His look was fixed on the porch beneath which Adèle had vanished, and there was a thoughtful smile on his handsome face, that brought a frown to Jeannette's brow. She did not like it. Suddenly he looked round, left the window, and crossed the room; presently she heard his voice conversing with some person within. Comforting herself with the nice distinction that she was hearing and not listening, Jeannette heard him saying impatiently—

"I tell you I want it to-day."

To which a voice which Jeannette recognised as that of Monsieur Pierre, submissively replied—

"But I have had the honour of explaining to Monsieur that this is to show; that I will procure him—"

"I will have this or none: name your price."

The reply of Monsieur Pierre was inaudible, but Jeannette distinctly heard the chinking of money. "What can he have been buying?" thought Jeannette. Presently she heard the door of Mr. Osborne's room close, and Monsieur Pierre appeared in the passage with a twinkle in his eye and a happy smile on his lip.

"May I trouble you for the little morocco case I left?" he asked, with a good-humoured nod.

"I dare say Jean is up-stairs," drily said Jeannette.

Whistling as he went, Monsieur Pierre went up the staircase. Jeannette was assiduously dusting the bannisters when he returned. He touched his cap to her, and walked to the front door; then suddenly striking his forehead, like one who remembers a thing he has forgotten, he stepped back to Mr. Osborne's door, knocked, and was admitted. In two minutes he reappeared. With another touch of his cap to Jeannette, he was going to leave the house, when, going up to him, she observed with unusual friendliness—

"Did you find what you had lost?"

"Left, not lost," he civilly replied. "Yes, Mademoiselle Jeannette, I found it. Good morning!"

"What a hurry you are in. Let me see it again."

"Impossible! I gave my word of honour not to show it."

"But I have already seen it," sharply said Jeannette.

"But I did not show it; so honour is safe," replied Monsieur

Pierre, smiling. "Good morning, Mademoiselle." With his politest bow, he vanished.

"As if I believed a word of that," indignantly muttered Jeannette.

At once her resolve was taken. She went and knocked at Mr. Osborne's door, and looking in, coolly asked "If Monsieur had rung?"

"No; but come in all the same."

Jeannette entered. She saw a heap of five-franc pieces on the table, but nothing like a morocco case. Mr. Osborne took four pieces of silver, and putting them in Jeannette's hand, he simply said,—

"I breakfast at eight, and I dine at six."

And having thus virtually constituted her cook and house-keeper, and empowered her to rule that inner realm of every household—the kitchen—he left the room.

"With all that money on the table," thought Jeannette, "his father would not have done that."

And her thoughts were taking a turn decidedly favourable to her new master, when she saw him cross the court and enter the garden.

"Well, what is he going there for?" half indignantly thought Jeannette. "Ah! it will not end well."

Mr. Osborne had certainly not gone to his own garden, to see Adèle; yet it so happened that he had not walked ten steps before, turning the corner of an alley, the young girl stood before him, waiting, with a mien half shy and half daring, for him to pass.

She was fresh as a wild rose still bathed in morning dew; and as she bent her head to Mr. Osborne, with grave courtesy, he could not help smiling. She gave him a sense of quick living freshness, like a breeze from the mountain—like a shower of spring rain sparkling on the grass.

"Good morning!" she said, gravely.

"Good morning!" he replied, amused at her quaint manner.

"Did you sleep well?" she pursued.

Mr. Osborne bit his lip, but gave a reply both courteous and satisfactory.

With unmoved gravity Adèle continued, "I ask, because, when I came to Courcelles, I could not sleep at all. But that was a long time ago; I was only a little girl then." Without giving him time to make any remark, she observed, as she half turned away,—

"You had a bad breakfast this morning; but Cousine will see to your dinner."

"Mademoiselle de Janson is gone," said Mr. Osborne.

Adèle looked slightly surprised, and pensively leaned her cheek on her hand; but she was too much accustomed to be nothing to Mademoiselle de Janson, to say more than—

"Ah, I would have bid her good bye if I had known it."

"I am going to Lyons soon," said Mr. Osborne; "I shall be very happy to be the bearer of any letter or message for Mademoiselle de Janson with which you may choose to entrust me."

She smiled, surprised, in his face. She was unused to courtesy; she was astonished at the idea of writing to her cousin.

"You are very kind," she said, "but Mademoiselle de Janson would not like it."

"But I may say that I left you in good health."

"Say nothing about me," seriously replied Adèle; "Cousine does not like to hear about me at all. I am a nuisance to her—poor Cousine," she added, explanatorily.

But she said it with a smile. She might be a nuisance, but she certainly did not break her heart about it.

"Truly, God is good to the forsaken," thought Mr. Osborne. "He gives them a light heart."

Wild as her education was, Adèle had innate French politeness. She thought herself bound to keep up the conversation.

"Do you like Courcelles?" she asked, as if he were not the master of Courcelles.

"Very much indeed. Do you?"

"Oh, yes; I was reared here, you know."

"And so was I," he echoed, turning round, with a smile and a sigh, to look at the old Manor.

Courcelles was not a beautiful building. It had been edified in the ages of strength, and it still rose a fortress as well as a dwelling. Broad, high, massive, solid stone, from basement to roof, with turrets at its angles, and no ornaments in its façades, save a few arched windows, it yet commanded attention. Its size made it look imposing; the eye could not rest without some wonder on such a heap of stone, piled to shelter one family; its hue, of a tawny white, which in the morning sun looked red, was warm and mellow. Flights of steps led from the garden to the ground-floor apartments. One, steeper than the rest, rose to the first floor, and ended in a pretty little gallery, with delicate pillars and graceful arches, which Mr. Osborne admired aloud. Adèle did not answer. He looked; she was gone; and M. Morel

stood before his master in obsequious attitude. The handsome and elegant Mr. Osborne scanned the low brow, the sly Tartar eyes, the flattened nose, and broad unmeaning mouth, of the foreman, as he stood before him, hat in hand, with a repulsion he could not conquer. A cold bend of the head was all the acknowledgment M. Morel's humble obeisance obtained.

"I have taken the liberty of intruding on Monsieur," said the foreman, in the soft voice which had already irritated and annoyed his fastidious master, "according, however, to the permission which I received last night from Monsieur, and, indeed, I thought Monsieur would like to know that a large order from Lyons came this morning, and that it is necessary a reply should be returned as early as possible. I hope Monsieur will have the goodness to excuse me."

"There is no need," impatiently replied Mr. Osborne. "You did quite right. From whom is the order?"

"From Dubois et Cie. I have brought Monsieur the letter, which, owing to the absence of Monsieur, was directed to me. I dare say Monsieur is aware, that, owing to the trust and confidence which his late honoured father reposed in me, I was authorized to receive and execute orders for Osborne et Cie."

"Yes, I know," replied Mr. Osborne, looking up from the letter which he hastily perused, "I remember it. These Dubois ask for credit. Are they safe?"

"They have always had credit from Osborne et Cie. But perhaps Monsieur would not mind coming over to the counting-house and looking at the books."

"Very well," impatiently replied Mr. Osborne, whom the word "books" unpleasantly reminded, that, spite smiling sky, mountain and lake, he was in the fangs of business; "but first of all, Monsieur Dubois, tell me this——"

"Monsieur commits a slight mistake; François Morel to serve him, is my name."

"Well then, Monsieur Morel, can you tell me how my father spent some money on the Manor of Courcelles, and how I find it as it is, a ruin?"

"That money must have been spent a long time ago," placidly replied M. Morel.

"Why so?" sharply asked Mr. Osborne.

"Or it must have been whilst I was in Lyons," continued the foreman; "though if Monsieur will permit me to express an opinion on the subject, I should say, that, considering the state in which the Manor is now, it has never been repaired at all."

Mr. Osborne looked at M. Morel very fixedly, but the look did not for a moment discompose a face as placid and as yellow as a sheet of parchment. Still the foreman stood there, hat in hand, waiting the leisure of his master.

Such coolness is always irritating, and it was with secret impatience that Mr. Osborne intimated to M. Morel his readiness to follow him to the counting-house. With impassible mien the foreman acted as guide, and led his master through the quiet garden and past the noisy forge to the place of business.

Letters, books, and accounts, were quickly spread before Mr. Osborne. He did not labour under the disadvantages usually incidental to the poetical temperament. His mind was clear and firm, and fully equal to any sort of business. He simply hated it. Nature had wholly denied him that love for making money which great commercial nations are fond of calling energy, and which, in persevering obstinacy, almost equals that noble characteristic of the human mind.

With great clearness and rapidity Mr. Osborne grasped the present state of affairs in the firm of Osborne et Cie. He found it in France much the same as in England, safe as yet, but involved in many and perplexing speculations. Every answer he received from Monsieur Morel, and that worthy individual might have been called the Dictionary of Osborne et Cie., so clear and laconic were his replies, confirmed Mr. Osborne in this view. Not that M. Morel in any way implied that such too was his opinion; to no opinion of any sort did he give utterance or pledge himself. His business was to know all and tell what he knew, and beyond this he did not go.

But this he did admirably, as Mr. Osborne could not but acknowledge internally. If he wished for a paper, an account, a reference, he had but to speak. As exact and almost as prompt as the geni slave of the lamp in the Eastern story, Morel noiselessly did his master's bidding, spoke not unless when questioned, nor looked without motive.

This model of a foreman showed anxiety but on one subject: to be relieved from the heavy responsibility that had rested on him during the last four weeks, and to obtain, as far as circumstances allowed, Mr. Osborne's opinion of the course he had held. He begged being excused for showing himself rather importunate on that head, but Monsieur would, he was sure, understand how desirous he felt to be relieved from this weight of cares, and to know how far it had been his good fortune to obtain the approbation of Monsieur.

Mr. Osborne had no motive for refusing to comply with this natural request. He did so at once, and the result of the examination was a quiet but handsome compliment paid by the master of Courcelles to his foreman, and acknowledged by the latter with a short little bow. Mr. Osborne now rose to leave, but M. Morel placing a new packet of letters and papers before him, gently supposed that before going Monsieur would like to look at these. William Osborne resumed his seat without showing any impatience, and leaving him thus engaged, the foreman went back to his own desk, where he was soon busy writing.

The papers over which Mr. Osborne now glanced, related to certain complications of the business not quite so easy to master or to understand, as the simpler matters which Morel had, until then, laid before his master. But of all men, Mr. Osborne was the last to relish or to submit to being in the power of a dependant; and as he entertained, moreover, a strong suspicion that M. Morel had kept back these papers for the end, in order to perplex him and compel him to do something more than put brief questions, Mr. Osborne had the pride or the weakness, whichever it was, to resolve on conquering alone. He therefore quietly allowed M. Morel to remain at his desk; nay, more, certain matters which he had thought to leave for the morrow, he decided on despatching off at once. Thus he remained engaged until dusk, when the foreman observed meekly:

"Jean wishes to know if Monsieur is going in to dinner."

Mr. Osborne turned round and saw the withered old servant standing at the door, and waiting for a reply.

"Send me in some dinner here," he said; and, without noticing the indignant amazement of Jean, nor even the slight raising of the eyebrow in which M. Morel indulged, he at once returned to his occupation.

Jean went away grumbling. A whole day had he spent with Jeannette in preparing that despised dinner; they had had a serious quarrel concerning a certain sauce; and they had been mercilessly teased by the presence and interference of Adèle. And that was the end of it: a corner of the counting-house table. The anger and indignation of Jean increased at the close of this unlucky meal, half of which Mr. Osborne had not deigned to touch.

"You are but an ill-licked bear for all your fair looks" growled Jean, as he retired a second time, leaving Mr. Osborne deep in his papers.

At eight, M. Morel looked up from his desk, and meekly

inquired if Monsieur required his services; he received a quiet denial; upon which he leisurely rose, took off his black linen sleeves, folded them neatly, carefully put them away, left not a stray paper to disgrace the propriety of his desk, and finally, having comprised the whole room in a glance, and ascertained that it needed him not, he left with an humble—

“ I have the honour to bid Monsieur good-night.”

To which, without raising his eyes from his desk, Mr. Osborne replied, with a quiet “ Good-night, Monsieur Morel.”

For several hours he worked on alone; then, worn and wearied, he pushed away his papers, and rising, slowly walked up and down the counting-house.

What had he seen or read there, that clouded his brow? He had seen that the most secure stand on the verge of peril; he had read that speculation had been carried to folly and excess; and he saw and guessed how hard was the task which lay before him, how much harder than it had first seemed.

Again he sat down and leaned his brow upon his hand; lone was the spot, silent was the night; the noise of the forge long had ceased; the workmen were at rest; the envied master could scarcely snatch a few moments of repose. Oh! how he regretted his quiet artist life of lonely wandering! Somewhat drearily he looked around him.

The lamp burned dim in the dark counting-house. Without, the rushing of a brook was faintly heard. Twelve struck from the belfry of the little church beyond the lake, and every stroke sounded distinct and clear. What brought the troubles and the cares of the world to this peaceful mountain solitude?

Suddenly the wind rose; with a wild moan it swept far away among the hills. The sound brought back a storm-vexed sea, a wrecking ship, and a terror-struck crew, of whom Mr. Osborne had once been one; and as the picture rose before him distinct and clear as reality, he exclaimed with a half-sigh:

“ Oh! Danger, where art thou not?”

CHAPTER VII.

RESTLESSNESS.

"JEANNETTE."

"Mamzelle!"

"I think it will never be six o'clock."

Jeannette did not reply; but she paused in her spinning, and looked extremely grave.

She sat in the same spot where Adèle had found her the day before, and where she had given Monsieur Morel his answer. But Adèle, instead of sitting on the stone step opposite her old friend, hearing her dreaming reminiscences of the past without heeding them, stood by her side, restless and impatient, looking at the sky, and wondering why the sun lingered so long there, and did not set. These signs, besides the exclamation we have recorded, were noted and internally commented upon by Jeannette, who drew her own conclusions, and, as she said herself, knew or rather did not know, what to think.

This had been a trying day—a day of unquietness. It might have been pleasant to the culinary feelings of Jeannette to prepare once more a dainty meal, of savoury dishes; it might, if Jean had not helped and Mademoiselle Adèle meddled. With one she quarrelled about a sauce; with the other she had a warm discussion about a certain cream, which *bon gre malgré* Jeannette had to make. This settled, Adèle amused herself with the task of preparing the Hall for its master, whom she persisted in treating as a guest. She altered the place of every chair, settled the table, smoothed the cloth, gathered with her own hands a plate of the best and ripest fruit which the orchard yielded; and this task over, she returned to the garden, where she found Jeannette spinning in the sun, as calmly as if the dinner were not cooking alone in the kitchen. Adèle could not check a remonstrance.

"It is all right," drily answered Jeannette.

A brief silence followed; and at length Adèle, in her impatience, gave utterance to the remark with which this chapter opened, and announced it as her deliberate opinion that it would never be six o'clock.

Jeannette looked grave, for she forgot that Adèle was sixteen, and led a dull life, to which every incident must be an event. Then casting a glance at the mingled sunshine and shadow that gave light and gloom on the walls of the old Manor, and indignantly declaring that it was not six, but seven, she despatched

Jean, who had approached in the meanwhile, to the counting-house. Jean went, and returned with the information that Mr. Osborne would dine in the counting-house. Adèle looked blank; Jeannette turned scarlet, and folded her arms.

"I wash my hands of him," she said; "not another dinner of my cooking shall he eat."

"Jeannette!" cried Adèle.

"Let him cook himself!" pursued Jeannette. The aristocratic blood of eleven centuries rose to the young girl's brow. With a quiet gesture of her little hand, she said, "Please never to speak so again."

But Jeannette, unaccustomed to obey any save Mademoiselle de Janson, now looked so rebellious, and Adèle was so haughtily resolute, that Jean hastened to observe, in a conciliatory tone—

"There is a way of settling all that; for Louise asked me this morning if any one was wanted."

Here he paused abruptly, aghast at the blunder he had committed. Louise was a spinster of Jeannette's own age; they had had a quarrel at fifteen, about precedence in a country ball; and this mortal wound had never been rightly healed. Rivalry of another kind, but unconfessed, had embittered it. Jean had flirted with Louise some twenty years before, and Jeannette had never forgotten the affront. Most unlucky, therefore, was the suggestion he now made of introducing, in a fashion highly offensive to Jeannette's pride, this ancient enemy.

In a voice tremulous with anger, Jeannette supposed that it would indeed be very satisfactory to the feelings of Monsieur Jean to bring Mademoiselle Louise into the house, but she regretted to inform him that her duty to Monsieur Osborne would not allow her to consent to the proposed measure. She could not conscientiously allow a person of Mademoiselle Louise's character to enter the Manor of Courcelles, and plunder an unfortunate stranger.

"I am sorry for it," she continued, with cutting sarcasm, "for of course, it would have been pleasant to you, Monsieur Jean, and I should like to oblige an old fellow-servant; but I cannot, Monsieur Jean, I cannot." And the wheel went round with dazzling rapidity.

Jean looked extremely piteous, and vainly cast imploring glances at the obdurate Jeannette. Adèle, feeling that she would be unable to repress a tendency to laugh, and not wishing to yield to it, silently left them, and went down the garden.

She went to the orchard. The golden light of sunset filled it to overflowing; the birds sang sweetly; soft clouds floated with airy grace in the blue heights of the sky; Adèle watched them till they vanished one by one; and in watching them, she forgot how provoking it was of Mr. Osborne not to have come in to dinner.

Sweet to childhood and to youth is the companionship of their own thoughts, and never had Adèle felt more charmed with her own fancies than on this evening. She lingered in the orchard until the stars came out in the sky, filling it fast, until the dew fell on the sleeping grass and flowers, and until Jeannette, uneasy at her long absence, came out to look for her young mistress.

"What do you want, Jeannette?" a little impatiently asked Adèle.

"Holy Virgin, Mamzelle! you do not want to sleep in the orchard to-night?"

"I do not want to sleep anywhere," was the cool reply of Adèle. "Why should I stifle myself up in a close little room?"

"Well, well, it is scarcely a room for a lady of the house of Courcelles," replied Jeannette, folding her arms, and speaking dolefully—and we may as well remark that to be doleful had become the chief enjoyment of her life—"I remember the time when I would scarcely have slept in such a room myself. But everything changes in this world; the world changes, and we change along with it. You would not think so, Mamzelle Adèle, but I was once reckoned a pretty girl; and it was only to-day, just after you left us, that Jean, silly old fellow, reminded me how, walking behind two gentlemen of these parts, the Chevalier d'Auxern and the Vicomte de Loyes, he heard them talking about the pretty black-eyed girl of Courcelles. Ah, well! where is the use of thinking of that now? The world goes round like a spinning-wheel, and cunning are they who can make it stop. Vicomte and chevalier are now but a little heap of dust, and Jeannette will soon be like them."

Here Jeannette, whose eyes had been bent on the earth, raised them with a sigh, and found that she was alone.

Whilst she spoke, Adèle looked on the darkening night, and was seized with an irresistible longing to breathe the cool air—to run unchecked along the silent and lonely alleys seemed the very desire of her heart—a sweet and stolen pleasure. "If I stay here," she thought, "Jeannette will tease me to go in."

Unheard, she stole away a few steps; then, light as a lapwing, and joyous as a bird escaped from its cage, she ran along the first garden path.

Sweet, indeed, must be liberty, when its image, a moment's release, can be so sweet. The night was dark, but Adèle knew no fear; and though the moon hid beneath dark clouds, and shone with watery gleam on the decaying statues, she went on, happy in the very sense of the solitude and desolation that reigned around her; nor did she stop until she reached the limits of the garden most remote from the Manor. A wall and a door had once guarded it on this side, but the door was shattered, and a deep gap yawned in the ivied wall close by. The forge was silent, though the stream rushed down from the mountain with the voice of a torrent; the sounds of labour had long ceased; but a light shone like a star in the silent counting-house. Adèle stood still and watched it dreamily; scarcely a few yards divided her from the spot where that light burned. It shone full and clear on Mr. Osborne's grave face. Adèle sat down on the edge of the wall, and looked at him long and pensively. Why did he look so anxious? Why did he walk up and down with that restless step, or lean his brow upon his arm with that worn mien? Was it trouble that ailed him? She might put the question, for as yet that sad knowledge had not come to her. Her life was like her temper—a genial summer sky without a cloud.

She looked at him again. He now sat facing her; his look fixed on vacant space, seemed to seek and meet hers; and Adèle, forgetting that though she could see she could not be seen, returned it with friendliness. "Poor fellow!" she said, half aloud, half to her own thoughts, "what ails you? You are rich, and I am poor as Job; yet I am always merry, and you look sad. You are shut up, with heavy books of figures, in that close room; and I, free as air, run about your garden, on this beautiful night, with nothing but the stars to reckon. Do like me, and be gay as I am."

"Holy Virgin! Mamzelle Adèle, who are you talking to?" asked Jeannette, coming up, out of breath, behind her young mistress.

"Why, to myself, of course!" replied Adèle, without looking round,—for the habit of talking aloud was one which she had contracted in her solitude.

"And what are you doing here, Mamzelle?" asked Jeannette.

"Looking at Monsieur Osborne," said Adèle; "one can see him quite well from here."

Jeannette was confounded, and knew not what to think.

There are few characters more perplexing than those of the perfectly sincere. Disguise of any sort was so distasteful to Adèle, that, right or wrong, she always said whatever she thought and did; and, accordingly, Jeannette never could tell when her young mistress gave much or little weight to actions so freely confessed.

"If one could only make her out a bit," thought Jeannette.

"Looking at him! Holy Virgin!—what can she want with looking at him?"

"And do you know, Jeannette," earnestly continued Adèle, far from divining the nature of the old woman's thoughts, "do you know what I think of his face this morning? It is better than handsome, Jeannette; it looks noble and good. And now we will go in," she added, lightly leaping down from the broken wall on which she had been sitting.

She went in, gaily talking all the way. Jeannette followed, moodily silent. As they reached the Manor, Adèle stood still, and looked back. The light in the counting-house was still burning.

"Poor fellow!" she thought, but not aloud; and still she stood and looked. There came to her a vague sense of the cares which haunted that lonely vigil, and with it a vague, daring wish to know what trouble and sorrow were like. Imprudent girl! to wish for the knowledge which Fate so rarely denies.

CHAPTER VIII.

MADemoiselle DE JANSON'S GIFT.

MR. OSBORNE went to Lyons, and he had been gone a week. Jeannette sat spinning in the garden by the light of the declining sun; the walls of the Manor looked warm and brown in the yellow glow; a soft breeze stirred the green plants that grew in every dark crevice; swallows skimmed in the air with short shrill twitterings, and the wheel of Jeannette went on with a drowsy murmur. The tasks of Jean in house and garden were long over,

yet, still armed with his eternal rake, he scraped the gravel up and down the path; he plucked a weed and threw it away, then, finding nothing more to do, he leaned on his rake, and stared vacantly at Jeannette.

He was absorbed in the contemplation, and Jeannette was absorbed in her task; neither spoke until a third person disturbed a silence which both enjoyed. M. Morel came up, with his slouching gait, and a sneer on his yellow face, that roused at once all the ire of Jeannette.

"Where is Mamzelle Adèle?" he asked impudently.

Adèle was a sensitive subject with both the old servants. Jean swayed his long body to and fro, and looked ireful; Jeannette gave her wheel a jerk, and said, indignantly,—

"Mamzelle Adèle is well where she is, and you are well where you are, Monsieur Morel."

M. Morel shrugged his shoulders.

"Ah! bah!" he said, "I do not want her—not I. But a promise is a promise; and as I promised her to-day, that as soon as I knew Monsieur was coming back, I should let her know, I came to tell her that he will be here this evening. You may tell her or not, just as you please; but Mamzelle Adèle is pretty anxious about Monsieur Osborne's return, I can tell you; for she asked me yesterday, and before yesterday; and she came to me in the counting-house to-day to know if Monsieur Osborne was ever coming back. A pleasant evening to you, Monsieur Jean; you are more in the good graces of Mademoiselle Jeannette than I am."

And without waiting for observation or reply, he walked away. The two old servants exchanged looks of dismay.

"What can the little thing be thinking of?" groaned Jeannette; "and what will he think of it?"

"He looks like a good gentleman," dubiously said Jean.

"Good or bad, what will he think? Ah, Monsieur Jean, that comes of letting young ladies of good family grow up like weeds in a garden, instead of locking them up until their wedding-day; for, you see, they are proud and haughty, and high-bred, and they will have their way; and they have fancies, too, that never enter the heads of poor girls; therefore, I say, lock them up—cage them all."

Jean gently demurred, and logically proved to Jeannette, that with a little watching, it was difficult that Adèle and Monsieur Osborne should meet often, and impossible that they should

meet alone ; and whilst he was proving it, that impossible event was taking place in another part of the garden.

Mr. Osborne reached Courcelles as the sun was near setting ; he entered the counting-house for a few minutes, read the letters which he found there, and was duly informed by Monsieur Morel that the young lady had been very anxious for the return of Monsieur.

"What young lady?" coldly asked Mr. Osborne.

"Mademoiselle Adèle. She asked me three times when Monsieur was coming back."

"Please to answer these letters at once," said Mr. Osborne, leaving the counting-house.

"I knew he would," muttered Monsieur Morel, as, looking after his patron, he saw him, instead of riding round to the Manor, enter the garden.

The evening was beautiful, and Mr. Osborne thought of nothing save its beauty. Slowly he walked on, enjoying the serene purity of eve, until he came to an old-fashioned maze, which, since his boyhood, he had loved, partly for its quaint beauty, and more, perhaps, for its solitude. On he went, until he reached the central arbour ; a warm and yellow light shone on the close boxwood hedge, and gilded the mutilated statue of Silence that stood in its verdant niche, with its stone finger lightly laid on its mute lips. On the step of the half-broken pedestal Adèle sat reading. Her head was bent, her eyes were fastened on the book in her lap, her hands were folded around her knees ; her feet were crossed, her look and attitude expressed a mind absorbed.

Mr. Osborne stood for a while looking at her curiously ; she was evidently unconscious of his presence, and wrapped in her book. He saw her cheek flush, her lip tremble, and finally her tears fell fast and free, like those of a child, on the page over which she bent.

"What can she be reading?" thought Mr. Osborne. At that moment Adèle raised her eyes and saw him. At once her face lit, and with a joyful start, she exclaimed :

"Oh, I am so glad !" and immediately she added, "I have been longing for you to come back !"

Mr. Osborne looked at her with slight wonder ; but without giving him time to linger on the feeling, she said, ardently :

"Oh ! do tell me all about it. What becomes of Octave, and is Marie dead or not ?"

Mr. Osborne glanced at the book in her lap, and recognized

the first volume of a tale he had been reading, and which he had forgotten in the garden, where Adèle had probably found it. On thus learning the cause of her great anxiety for his return, he could not help looking down in the young girl's face with a quiet smile.

"I wish I could gratify you," he said, "but it is unfortunately not in my power. I do not know what became of Mark Antony."

"Octave, you mean," she interrupted.

"True. I am ignorant of his fate as well as of that of Marie. And as I have unfortunately left the second volume behind in Paris, I can give you no exact clue to their destiny."

Adèle looked blank.

"I thought you had taken it to Lyons," she said, "and that I should know everything when you came back; and instead of that, here I am as much perplexed as ever about the ending."

"Why not invent one then?" he suggested.

Adèle looked up surprised. He stood leaning against the pedestal at the foot of which she sat. We have already said that Mr. Osborne was handsome; but his countenance had other characteristics than those of mere beauty, it was grave and benignant: a calm face where unquietness and passion had never dwelt, or whence they had long since passed away. This serenity sometimes degenerated into coldness and even into seeming severity, but rarely when he spoke to a woman or a child, and Adèle had something of both. As he now looked down at her, the half smile of his lips seemed to her to shine from the very depth of his dark eyes.

"Invent an ending!" echoed Adèle.

"Why not?" he asked with a smile of which she felt the kindness, and not the irony. For his nature like that of the poet, was double: imaginative and ironical. He was born disappointed, and had he been a poet in speech, as he was in feeling, he would have sung, not through the spirit of content, but with the voice of regret or desire. As it was, if he enjoyed the beautiful with the luxurious keenness which is the privilege of some minds, yet he had also the sad gift, to measure, with a pitiless eye, the shortcomings of men and things. Had he now spoken as he thought, it would have been to demolish the fair edifice which the young fancy of Adèle had so readily constructed; to deride Octave, sneer at Marie, and having laid the senseless idols in the dust, to leave them there. But he did not; he left the tale as it was, a wonderful tale; and the hero and the heroine, perfect and beautiful, and still smiling. He said again:

"Why care about the end? Birds sing the same song since the days of Adam and Eve, and man tells the same tale to man, for ever and ever again. I hold that there is but one perfect woman, dark or fair, it matters not; but one perfect man, strong yet gentle; and, as a novel is the story of humanity, and as humanity is man and woman, it follows that there is no more than one eternal novel; it may be told with a few changes, it matters not, it is still the same song."

"That may be," replied Adèle, looking disappointed. "But I wish I knew the real end for all that!"

Mr. Osborne did not insist, but, changing the subject, he observed:

"I had the pleasure of seeing Mademoiselle de Janson in Lyons. She was very glad to learn that I had left you in good health."

"Ah!" abstractedly said Adèle. "Was she well herself?" she asked, after a pause.

"Quite well."

Adèle asked no more questions; it was plain she expected nothing more.

"Your cousin requested me to give you this small parcel," pursued Mr. Osborne, producing a little packet as he spoke.

But Adèle did not hold out her hand to receive it; she looked not so much surprised as incredulous, and said briefly:

"That must be a mistake, sir. It cannot be for me!"

"Why not?" asked Mr. Osborne, looking amused.

"No, no; it cannot," persisted Adèle, with an obstinate shake of the head.

Mr. Osborne availed himself of the argument of Socrates, physical proof, and stooping, he quietly laid the packet in her lap. The scepticism of Adèle yielded to facts: her name was certainly written on the back of the parcel, in a hand like that of Mademoiselle de Janson. She broke the seal: wrapped in folds of tissue paper, she found a morocco case that drew from her an exclamation of surprise; for if not the same which she had seen a few days before, it was certainly very like it. She opened it at once, and within she found the case of ivory and all its golden treasures. For a while Adèle remained mute and breathless with mingled surprise and joy, then she looked up at Mr. Osborne, her cheeks flushed with pleasure, her eyes sparkling with delight.

"How kind, how very kind of Cousine, is it not?" she said at length, in a broken voice; "and I, who thought she did not care about me! Oh! how naughty it was of me, was it not?"

Tears rushed to her eyes as she made the penitent confession, and deepened their azure already so deep.

"But is it for me! really for me!" she added after a brief pause.

"Really for you," he replied, smiling.

Adèle laughed with pleasure. She took out the thimble and tried it on; she drew forth the scissors and recklessly clipped her little black apron; with a real needle, extracted from its case of gold, she drew mimic stitches; then light and frolicsome as a child, and without troubling herself to bid Mr. Osborne adieu, she threw down the volume that told the fortunes of Octave and Marie, and starting up from the step of the pedestal, she ran off through the maze, calling out in a clear and ringing voice:

"Jeannette, Jeannette, come and see!"

"Poor little thing!" thought Mr. Osborne, smiling at her childish joy, and stretching himself down on the low step, warm with the heat of the declining sun, he gazed at the clear and serene vault above him, and soon forgot Adèle and her pleasure.

That he was the author of that pleasure, we need scarcely tell the reader. He had availed himself readily of the first opportunity he had found, of gratifying one, who, when he came unknown and a stranger, had done her utmost to gratify him. Mr. Osborne had not forgotten her welcome on the evening of his arrival, nor a word of the brief conversation he had overheard between her and Jeannette. Hospitable had been her reception of the tired traveller; her little money had been spent to provide for his table, her little store of old wine had been opened to him. It pleased Mr. Osborne to return such kindness as it had been bestowed, secretly. Nature had given him the art of persuasion; he found the way to persuade Mademoiselle de Janson to send his gift in her own name to her little god-daughter, and by passing his word that as it had been his first, so it should be his last, he prevailed.

Unconscious of the truth, Adèle gaily ran on until she found Jeannette still spinning, but alone, in her favourite place.

"Look at what Cousine sends me!" triumphantly cried Adèle, holding up her treasure.

Jeannette remained amazed and mute. Adèle laughed with glee.

"Monsieur Osborne brought it," she pursued.

"And what will Mademoiselle do with it?" drily asked Jeannette.

"Use it to be sure."

"It is too fine."

"Was my great grandmother's wheel too fine?"

"Ah, but those were the good old times."

"Oh, you are very tiresome!" said Adèle, looking provoked, "and very croaking. I say it was kind of my dear godmother to send me that beautiful thing, and I shall write and thank her for it this very moment."

"Do, Mamzelle!" rather eagerly said Jeannette, "and I will post your letter myself."

"Well, then, if I write, it must be in the open air," said Adèle; "I cannot lock myself up in a close room on this beautiful evening."

"I shall go and fetch you everything you want," returned Jeannette, with unusual alacrity.

"Do, like a good soul," said Adèle; "I shall spin whilst you are away."

She sat down as Jeannette rose, and murmuring to herself an old ballad of the province, she spun as fast as her old friend, though perhaps not with as much skill. The sound of her own voice prevented her from hearing the step of Mr. Osborne on the gravel path behind her; and she did not see him until he sat down at the other end of the same bench with her. He did not speak, but looked at her with a kind smile, which Adèle returned freely. Nevertheless, his gaze bespoke such marked attention, that with her blunt frankness, she asked—

"Am I like any one you know?"

"Not exactly; but you remind me of my little girl."

The eyes of Adèle opened wide. "You have a little girl?" she said.

He assented, smiling.

"And a wife?"

"I am a widower;" but this time he did not smile.

"And how old is your little girl?"

"How old? really I have forgotten;—five—seven—I believe."

"Is she like you?"

I am told she is."

The return of Jeannette with pen, ink, and paper, interrupted the discourse.

"The bench will do for a table," said Adèle, "and this stone for a seat."

To the stone Mr. Osborne silently added the travelling cloak which he held on his arm. Adèle thanked him, and smiled. He

resumed his seat at the end of the bench. Jeannette removed her wheel to some distance, and watched with jealous attention.

Adèle soon laid down her pen, and said—

“Will your little girl ever come here?”

“It is not likely.”

“What a pity! I should have so liked to see her. I cannot write,” she added, after awhile, “the evening is too beautiful.”

And she laid her head on the bench, and looked at the sky.

Jeannette muttered to herself, and shook her head. The look of Mr. Osborne was slowly scanning the façade of the Manor. Adèle followed his glance, and saw it resting on a dark and ancient square of the building.

“That was the prison,” she said.

“The prison!” he echoed, surprised; “was there a prison here?”

“Ay! and they found bones in it at the revolution!” replied the young girl, carelessly; “perhaps that was why they guillotined all the De Courcelles.”

“Are there none left?”

“Jeannette, are there any Courcelles left?” asked Adèle, looking over her shoulder at the old woman.

Jeannette’s wheel paused, and she said, in measured accents—

“The De Courcelles were the greatest private family in all Burgundy, for they were descended from the Dukes, who, as every one knows, were of the royal blood of France itself. They were very proud, very insolent, and very cruel, for they were a great family. Mademoiselle de Janson is of the blood; but Mademoiselle Adèle de Courcelles is the last of the name.”

With some surprise Mr. Osborne heard this strange and impartial family genealogist; then with a half-smile, he looked down on the slight and almost childish girl, the sole living representative of a proud and warlike race.

She still sat at the foot of the bench, with her elbow resting upon it, and her cheek in her hand. She, too, smiled as she met his gaze, for she guessed his thoughts.

“Yes,” she said, with her gay frankness, “I am the last of their name; what matter?”

“You are not sorry?” said Mr. Osborne.

“Sorry!” echoed Adèle, “why should I be sorry? Let them be extinct; I say it is well. They were a fierce race in their day, fierce and terrible. Their power and their terror are

gone; their Manor is an appendage to a forge; their daughter is a poor girl who sleeps under their roof through the charity of a friend—'each in their turn,' says the proverb."

"Ah, Mademoiselle, Mademoiselle, how can you talk so?" indignantly groaned Jeannette.

"It is rank heresy!" said Mr. Osborne, smiling; "think of it, Mademoiselle Adèle, had Fortune's wheel but given one turn more or less, you might have been a princess."

"A princess!" here put in Jeannette, with the privileged liberty of a French servant, "a queen! Mademoiselle might have been a queen!"

"A queen! Mademoiselle Adèle, just think of it!" again said Mr. Osborne.

But Adèle only shook her gay head.

"I cannot bear a cap," she replied, "what should I do with a crown? Besides, queens cry more than they sing, 'tis said; and little Adèle de Courcelles, who runs about, and laughs, and sings, like a peasant-girl, is happier, I dare say, than Her Majesty, or her Royal Highness."

Mr. Osborne smiled at her careless philosophy; but old Jeannette shook her head, and muttered over her wheel:

"They were a wicked race: they feared neither God nor man, I grant it—but they were a great family for all that."

A long silence followed.

Mr. Osborne was vaguely enjoying the calm serenity of the hour; Adèle was wondering what his little girl was like, and Jeannette was meditating over the faded glories of the fallen race. The long dark figure of Jean emerging from the low door facing them, and his slow funereal voice disturbed them all three.

"Monsieur is wanted," he said.

"Who wants me?" asked Mr. Osborne, a little impatiently.

"Madame Osborne, Mesdemoiselles Osborne, who are just arrived," was the phlegmatic reply.

Mr. Osborne rose at once, and with a farewell smile to Adèle left the gardens. Adèle pouted, and looked provoked.

"I wish they had not come," she said, a little impatiently "I was just getting acquainted with Monsieur Osborne, and I like him very much."

"And I am very glad they are come," observed Jeannette, pursing up her lips.

"Why so?" shortly asked Adèle.

"I am very glad they are come," persisted the old woman, walking away with her wheel.

"Jeannette is very tiresome to-day," said Adèle; "what ails her, Jean?"

Jean shook his head.

"She was always an odd girl," he said; "very odd, Mamselle Adèle, no one could make her out."

"Let her be as odd as she likes," gaily said Adèle; "I have something better than my great-grandmother's wheel. Look, Jean."

She showed him triumphantly the morocco case; but Jean was not enthusiastic.

"Every one is tiresome to-day!" exclaimed Adèle, "every one, excepting Monsieur Osborne, who brings me delightful things from Lyons, and who is the handsomest and most charming man I have seen."

"Ah! if Mademoiselle Jeannette heard that," thought Jean, shaking his head ominously.

CHAPTER IX.

DOMESTIC.

Mrs. OSBORNE had come. She had come with her two daughters; with her eldest son, Capitaine Joseph, whom Mr. Osborne did not like, and had not invited, and with seven servants on whom he had not counted. Noise, confusion, soon filled the whole house. To complete Mr. Osborne's annoyance, a visitor, the Baron de Launay, dropped in, spent the evening with the ladies, and flirted with Isabella. With nervous horror, Mr. Osborne divined in him a future adorer; and as M. de Launay was his neighbour and commercial ally, there would be no keeping him away from the devoted dwelling. He was six feet high, a dandy from his wavy, fair hair to the tip of his boot; he had languid blue eyes, a rolling way of speaking, a blonde moustache, and a plump white hand; he affected English speech, English ways, and called Mr. Osborne, "My dear;" yet, spite these advantages, and spite, too, some talent, for Monsieur de Launay was not exactly a fool, he horrified William Osborne, who knew no relief until the family party broke up, and he could retire to his own rooms, and to what he prized scarcely less than their

solitude; their silence—for silence to him was dear as a friend, and sweet as sleep. Rude sounds, many voices, jarred on his nerves, and gave him a sense of pain.

Not without a purpose did he rise early the next morning and go down to the garden. The fragrance of the night still lingered on the air, the bright gemlike dew still sparkled on the gravelled path and on the leafy hedge; but vainly had Mr. Osborne hoped for solitude. Scarcely had he walked ten steps, when a fair hand was laid on his shoulder. He turned round and saw his blooming sister Isabella. They exchanged a friendly good morning. Isabella was handsome and truthful, qualities which her brother was prompt to recognise and appreciate. He was handsome and a gentleman, and Isabella liked beauty in men, and could feel the charm of good manners.

"How do you like the Baron?" she asked.

"Not at all—insufferable coxcomb!"

Isabella withdrew her hand from his shoulder, and broke off a twig from the hedge.

"By-the-way," she said, sharply, "what have you been saying to Anna about a young girl who does nice needlework?"

"What a ridiculous mistake," said Mr. Osborne, impatiently, "Anna complained of the want of society, and I mentioned to her Mademoiselle de Courcelles."

"Oh, is that foolish little thing still here?" interrupted Isabella.

Mr. Osborne had not time to reply; a short, square, and sallow man, with sallow hair and sallow moustache, clad in the military undress of a French officer, a cigar in his mouth, and his hands in his pockets, was approaching them with a cavalier air.

"Already in business," said Captain Joseph, taking out his cigar to speak, and alluding to a letter which Mr. Osborne held. "Ah, what a pity you do not know chess! You know that I am carrying on a game by correspondence?"

"And I," said Mr. Osborne, "must attend to my correspondence, and bid you good morning."

"Pray make no apologies," said Captain Joseph, in an affable tone, that implied, "Go, my dear fellow, go; I know that if you could help it you would not tear yourself from my charming society;" and sitting down on a bench, he crossed his legs, returned his hands to his pockets, and half shutting his eyes, he smoked lazily in the morning sun. Mr. Osborne gave him an ironical look, and was turning away, when Captain Joseph suddenly exclaimed—

"By-the-way, who is that little thing who sings like a lark? She awoke me this morning,—she actually did; and I looked out and saw her skipping in the dew like a rabbit. She is very little,—quite a bird,—and do you know she is very pretty,—positively she is," he added, impressively.

Mr. Osborne stopped short and looked so vexed, that Isabella, who was rude as well as true, burst out laughing; but when this merry mood was over, she turned to Mr. Osborne and said in English—

"Pray waste no wrath on him; he is obtuse,—leave the offender to me."

So saying, she passed her arm within that of Capitaine Joseph, and with a sisterly despotism to which he good-humouredly submitted, she led him away.

But brief was the respite Mr. Osborne thus enjoyed. Scarcely had he walked ten steps, muttering something about insolence, when he heard Anna in the neighbouring maze querulously scolding her French maid.

"How stupid and how selfish you must be," said Anna; "I told you to tell my brother, Monsieur Osborne, that I wanted to speak to him. Why did you bring me in this horrid cold garden?"

Mr. Osborne did not wait to hear the maid's reply, but hastily made his escape whilst still unseen. With a sigh he remembered the peace and solitude of the old garden on the preceding evening, and the little reader at the foot of the broken statue of Silence. Quietness and harmony seemed to have left his home. "They will scarcely follow me to the counting-house," he thought, as he proceeded to the place which from a prison seemed likely to become a refuge.

M. Morel was already bending over his desk; he raised his eyes on hearing his patron enter, and bowed with his whole body, then resumed his writing.

Mr. Osborne sank down on his chair, and leaned his brow on his hand with an aspect of weariness and ennui, that did not escape the foreman.

"Monsieur does not seem well this morning," he observed.

"Oh, I am well enough," was the careless reply. "What news?"

"Bad news, for it is doubtful, and good news shines like the sun at noonday."

"But the sun does not shine every day at noon, Monsieur Morel, and therefore your comparison does not hold good."

M. Morel smiled, and still writing, replied, "Monsieur is always in the right."

"But what is this news?" resumed Mr. Osborne, after a slight pause.

"The news is, that Dubois et Cie. have not yet stopped payment, but that they may do so to-day or to-morrow, especially if Monsieur like. But I have put all the papers on Monsieur's desk."

Mr. Osborne took up the packet of papers, glanced over them, dropped them from his hand, and leaning back in his chair, he folded his arms and bent his head in an attitude of mingled thought and sadness.

With him now lay the fate of a great commercial house half a century old. If he proved pitiless, if for the chance of his right he pressed his claim, it was almost certain that the house must fall; and if he proved clement, if he spared the struggling and the weak, might he not lose?

"He cannot make up his mind," thought Monsieur Morel, stealthily watching his master; but Mr. Osborne unluckily caught his eye and returned the look with one of such grave sternness, that he brought a faint glow of colour to his sallow cheek.

"Monsieur has no orders to give me?" he observed.

"None," was the laconic reply.

"Oh, dear! what a most inopportune moment I have chosen," said a soft voice at the door.

Mr. Osborne looked around with mingled surprise and displeasure, for he had recognized the tones of his stepmother. But she met his look with a smile of undisturbed complacency.

"Ah! how many recollections this place recalls!" said she, sinking down on the chair her stepson silently handed her; "the time when I shared the cares of business with my first husband seems to return."

She sighed; Mr. Osborne remained silent. Mrs. Osborne resumed.

"Well, I am a great bore to come here, am I not? but I feel anxious. Business has its diplomacy, as you know better than I do."

With a smile he disclaimed the compliment.

"Oh, yes, you do; but to come to the point, what families shall we visit and receive?—The Mazois, the De Launays, the Jolys?"

"Pray see whomsoever you please," he courteously replied; "I have nothing to do with it."

"My dear William, the diplomacy of business requires a selection. If you will hint to me to whom I am to pay more or less attention, whom I am to drop or to cultivate, I think I can render you good service."

But Mr. Osborne was not to be moved from his indifference.

"I am not a diplomatic man," he said, smiling; "I should commit some sad blunder. I leave all to your tact and good breeding."

The plain English of which was, that Mrs. Osborne was to know and be nothing. The spider whom Bruce watched in the peasant's hut was no unfair prototype of Mrs. Osborne. You could break her web, you could not discourage her. She rose as if to retire, then turned back, coughed, and said, with a touch of embarrassment—

"I am going to tread on delicate ground. But frankness is best; shall I call on Madame Lascours?"

"Why not?"

"My dear William, all the world knows why."

"Why should I object to meet Madame Lascours?" he asked, gravely. "She is not, so far as I can remember, a lady to be shunned, and her husband is one of the most honourable men of business in the province."

"Then I may ask them to dine with us next week?" said Mrs. Osborne.

Mr. Osborne smiled and said:

"They are in Paris."

"Then I need trouble you no more," she observed, reddening slightly. He courteously saw her to the door. She retired beaten, but not conquered.

The diplomacy of business having left Mr. Osborne inaccessible, Mrs. Osborne coolly and immediately took possession of the household and Manor of Courcelles: Jean and Jeannette were at once dismissed, and the new servants appointed to their duties; in short, by the time Mr. Osborne appeared at dinner a *coup d'état* had taken place, and a revolution was all but accomplished. But some bird of the air had conveyed the tidings to the counting-house. Mr. Osborne was not surprised; he smiled, he said a few words, and the tide of revolution rolled back: Jean and Jeannette were reinstalled, and the only consequence of Mrs. Osborne's attempt was, that of her seven servants, four at once took their way to Paris. Mrs. Osborne thus practically learned that, though her stepson might be passive and careless, he would not, however, allow her to be mayor of the palace.

The same evening, Jeannette was summoned to her master's room, and intrusted with a packet of books for her young mistress, with Mr. Osborne's compliments.

"Mademoiselle is going away to-morrow morning," boldly said Jeannette.

"Take her the books nevertheless," he said smiling. Mr. Osborne could rarely be deceived, and he now read an untruth in Jeannette's brown eyes.

And, indeed, it was not Adèle who went away the next morning, but Mr. Osborne himself.

Mrs. Osborne and her daughters had something like ten days given them, wherein to recover from the ill-humour into which the dismissal of the four servants had thrown them.

Mr. Osborne returned late one evening. He was passing by the half-open door of the Hall without entering, when his vigilant stepmother, who was writing her letters by the crimson-covered table, raised her head, saw him, and at once went out to meet him in the wide entrance. A lamp burning against the wall, feebly lit the staircase winding up in gloom.

"I have heard from Robert," she whispered confidentially.

"So have I: he has been to a fancy ball, has he not?"

"Ah! Why has he not your coolness, your firmness—" A loud crash within, followed by a French oath, interrupted the list of Mr. Osborne's qualities. Capitaine Joseph amused himself by playing chess alone in a window, and Isabella by walking up and down the room reading Hugo. Isabella was a fine girl, she occupied some space; several feet, some inches, did the circumference of her robes measure. As she passed by her brother, a flying flounce hooked a nail; down came table and chessmen. Capitaine Joseph's very moustache quivered, but Isabella only looked grand, and said imperially:

"Well!"

"Well, this is the third time!" cried Capitaine Joseph.

"Oh, what a noise they do make!" moaned Anna.

"Come, come, I will have peace. William is come back," said Mrs. Osborne, attempting to lead him in.

"Ah! bah! you are actually come back," cried Capitaine Joseph, recovering his good humour at once, and going up to Mr. Osborne to bestow on him a cordial shake of the hand. "Ah! mon cher, what a life I had of it in your absence! that foolish De Launay."

"No, no: I will allow no detraction," interrupted Mrs. Os-

borne. "William, you really must come in. I must speak to you."

Mr. Osborne yielded, but with evident weariness and ennui.

"Now do not be alarmed," she said graciously. "I have asked a few friends to dine with us to-morrow—the de Launays and the Mazois; and you must not be engaged—no, you really must not. It is only a quiet little dinner."

Mr. Osborne gave her a rapid look, but he bowed and gave consent.

"And now you must really allow me to retire," he said. "I have been riding all day."

"And that is dreadfully fatiguing," put in Capitaine Joseph. "I hate cavalry. By the way, what has become of that pretty little girl who awoke me the first morning I was here? I have not seen her since."

Mrs. Osborne was struck with the evident interest with which her stepson waited for the reply to this question, but she carelessly said:

"She is gone. She is something or other to Mademoiselle de Janson."

"I am glad she is gone," said Anna. "I do not like her."

"All girls are a nuisance," gravely said Isabella, who was not eighteen.

"Ah, bah! She is a nice little thing," put in Capitaine Joseph. "But women do not admire each other."

"Do men?" asked Isabella.

"My dear children," exclaimed Mrs. Osborne, who saw her stepson smiling ironically, "let there be peace I pray you."

Mr. Osborne was at the door; he turned round, bade them all good night, and left them to the enjoyment of the argument.

Courcelles was sadly in want of repair, and to the dismay of the ladies, masons made their appearance the next morning, and filled the Manor with noise and dust. Needless to say, that Mr. Osborne was in the midst of them. With his hat on, and his coat finely powdered with white, he stood on a scaffolding surveying the beginning of their work, whilst they were taking their frugal breakfast below, when a light rustling sound above, made him look up. With surprise, he saw Adèle.

She sat on the sill of a small circular window, half in and half out; her feet rested on a sculptured ledge, her hands were clasped around her knees, her look was fixed on the uneven line of mountains before her. Mr. Osborne she did not see; he stood too near the wall. He was going to address her, but she did not

give him time. She rose, cast a quick look around, leaped down on the scaffolding light as a squirrel, skipped down a ladder, and was running along a garden path before he had fairly recovered from his surprise.

Adèle never stopped until she reached the flight of steps that led to the lake. The sun had not come there yet; the spot was cool and shady. She sat down on the balustrade, and looking at the clear water beneath her, she fell into a delightful dream, of which the prevailing feeling was solitude and liberty.

Spite some petulance and some waywardness, her nature was gentle, but it was also untamed and free. Ignorance often made her too daring; for no sad experience had taught her the virtue of mistrust, but it had also left untouched a native wildness which had grown up with her growth, and which nothing in after-life could efface. Restraint she had never known even in name, for she had never been loved enough to be checked. Mademoiselle de Janson, convinced that the world was going away, did not see the necessity of teasing herself and her goddaughter with useless control; Jeannette did, indeed, try to interfere, but she only had the limited authority of a faithful servant, and could not rule one whom she was also bound to obey. Natural delicacy, and that innate sense of grace, which is born with some individuals, as it is sometimes with whole races, saved Adèle from either rude motion or rude speech. Though untaught and wild, she was still a lady and a girl, but at the same time a youth of liberty rendered her unable to bear restraint. It stifled and oppressed her like the close air of a prison.

In a moment of kindness and generosity, Adèle had promised Jeannette to keep out of the way of the English family, and not to pass the threshold of certain rooms up-stairs; but Jeannette, having unfortunately thought proper to ensure the performance of that promise, by locking her young mistress in, Adèle, indignant and angry, considered herself free to break her word, and made her escape. Once in the garden, she only felt the delight and happiness of her recovered freedom.

And it was a day to linger out. Below her lay the lake, cool and green; around it rose mountains with blue depths of shade and bold projections, basking in the noonday sun. Wild and steep was their aspect; a savage solitude in which the artist would wander with delight, and where the poet would love to linger. On the lake sailed a boat with a white sail. Adèle knew by Jeannette that Mr. Osborne had purchased a boat,

though he had not yet been out in it. She slowly followed the slender craft in its track, as it idly skirted the opposite bank.

"How delightful to sail away for ever in a white boat," she thought, "with the sun always shining, and the shore never reached. Is that his boat? is he in it?"

She shaded her eyes with her hand, the better to see; but a slight sound made her turn her head. She looked, and saw Mr. Osborne behind her.

"I am glad to see you safe," he said.

At first, Adèle did not understand; then suddenly she guessed that he had seen her, and she smiled triumphantly.

"I can do a great deal more than that," she said; "I can climb in a tree."

"And perch there like a bird on a bough, very likely; and, indeed, I thought you had flown away like a bird."

The young girl pouted.

"Jeannette is so tiresome," she said, "but I will not be a prisoner in those dull rooms up-stairs where I cannot breathe; I will not sit and sew, and hear what a great family the De Courcelles were. What should I have done but for the books you were so kind as to send me? Oh, they have made me long to know so many things, and one thing above all!"

"Music? drawing?"

"Oh, I might as well wish for wings!"

"History is more accessible."

"Yes, but what should I do with history?"

"True, you are a contemner of the past."

"Jeannette calls me a Jacobin."

"I fear Jeannette is in the right. But what can you so much desire to know?"

"What a city is like," she said, looking in his face with a look that plainly said, "tell me."

Mr. Osborne looked at the ancient garden so beautiful in its decay; his gaze took in the aspect of the yet more ancient hills; it reposed on the freshness of their verdure, on the cool surface of the glittering lake, and embraced the whole azure expanse of the summer heavens. "A city," he thought, "a city with its living millions, its swarming streets, its close houses, and ever-clouded sky! who would wish for a city?" And here was one who from the very bosom of nature pined for fuller knowledge of the dwellings of man. His mind repeated to his mind the question, "What is a city like?" It embraced the strange activity of life, and penetrated the mysterious depths of the human hive;

it saw Splendour in her palace, Misery in her hovel, and next to both, the child of one, and the parent of the other—Vice: and he quite forgot Adèle and her expecting look.

"What can he be thinking of?" she wondered; "he is odd!"

Longer still she might have wondered, if the approach of M. François Morel had not put an end to her expectation, and to the conversation. Mr. Osborne hastily looked at the packet of papers presented to him by the foreman, then with a clouded brow he turned to Adèle and bade her good morning. At the corner of an alley he met his stepmother returning from an early walk. He signed to M. Morel to go on, and stopped to speak to her.

"I have a favour to ask of you," he said. She looked pleased and expectant. He pursued—"I should like Mademoiselle Adèle de Courcelles, who is still here, to be one of your dinner guests; it might amuse or please her."

"Dear me! I should be most happy!" exclaimed Mrs. Osborne, smiling; "but would it be kind to ask her?"

"Why not?"

"Ah, it is so difficult to make men understand these things. But what should the poor girl wear?"

"I had forgotten that all-important consideration—dress; yet I think it would trouble Mademoiselle de Courcelles very little."

"My dear William, granting, for the sake of argument, that Mademoiselle de Courcelles is such a little philosopher, would it be right to expose her to a slight, not expressed, of course, but one the less felt? Remember that this is a small provincial place."

"You are right, and I am wrong," he interrupted—but he looked little pleased—"let it be."

"Is there any other way in which I can be agreeable to Mademoiselle de Courcelles?" graciously asked Mrs. Osborne.

Mr. Osborne coldly replied in the negative. She bowed her head with a sweet smile, and walked on.

CHAPTER X.

THE DINNER.

THE Manor of Courcelles was in agitation and stir ; the quiet little dinner was upsetting everything. A first-rate cook had travelled all the way from Dijon ; and he was in what the French call *le feu de la composition*. The guests, too, were arriving ; and from the garden, where he walked, impatient and annoyed, Mr. Osborne could hear their carriage-wheels rolling up the road. He had come there to enjoy peace and silence for a few moments before the coming bore, also to take a general survey of his domain, and see what he had to do there. He was too passionate a lover of nature to be very fond of such triumphs of art as were exhibited in the garden of Courcelles ; and yet, as he walked on in a region which he had not visited since his return—for instead of sloping down to the lake, it rose to the foot of a low wooded mountain, that protected the Manor against the keen northern wind—he half reluctantly found a charm in the antique formality and quaintness of its clipped hedges and trees ; and with a sort of pity and regret for their decay, he looked at the fallen statues that had been left to encumber the earth—at the green, moss-grown fountains, from which living waters once had played. At length he reached the orchard. With the aspect of this quiet spot there flashed across his memory a bright picture of the past. He saw himself a boy again, stealing the ripe fruit from the tree ; and sitting down on a stone bench near him, he yielded to one of the happiest moods which he had for a long time known. Apart from recollections in which all delight, he loved orchards wild and lone like this, where wild birds sang, and bees hummed, and yellow fruit ripened and reddened in the sun, and hung within reach. He loved Nature in her tame and quiet mood, as well as in her grandeur and wild beauty. He loved a green spot like this enclosed beneath a soft sky, where clouds floated on forever and ever away, as well as the vastness of a *campagna* meeting the boundless horizons of azure heavens. Gradually he sank down, reclining on the bench on which he had been sitting. The cares of business and of life were forgotten ; plunged in a dream as languid as that of the lotos-eaters of yore, but more sweet, he wandered into far dreamland. He entered lone and enchanted orchards, tasted of enchanted fruit, breathed enchanted air, and still man, though mortal no more, he wooed strange princesses,

and was beloved. Their perfumed breath fell on his brow—their calm, white hands enfolded him on silken laps—their low voices murmured him to charmed slumbers. But truth is better than dreams, any day. He heard a light step falling on the grass, he heard a light voice singing a gay, capricious warbling like the chirruping of a young bird, and he saw Adèle, in plain brown frock and narrow collar, gliding through the trees.

Though Adèle did not know that Anna did not like her, that Isabella thought her a nuisance, and that Mrs. Osborne would rather not have had her in the house, she shunned the English family of her own accord; and on this, the evening of the dinner, she had retired to the orchard with a volume of poems. But vainly she tried to read.

Books were made for the shade of quiet rooms, for the stillness of calm and silent cloisters, but not for nature and open sky. The hum of an insect, the passing of the wind, a rustling leaf, a floating cloud—were more to Adèle than the sweetest song of man. She dropped the book for a while, then forgot it, to sit down in the grass and remember nothing save the beauty of the hour. She was unconscious of the vicinity of Mr. Osborne, until she saw him leaning against a tree opposite that beneath which she was sitting. His look fell on the volume in the grass, and at once Adèle exclaimed,

“I could not read!”

“Not read poetry?” he said, taking up the volume, “incredible!”

Adèle looked abashed for a while; then suddenly raising her head again, she said boldly—

“Why not?—if I am stupid!”

“Ay—if! But, sincerely—do you think you are?”

She laughed, and frankly answered, “No!”

He smiled, pleased with her daring and her candour; and curious to know what direction her literary tastes took, he opened the volume, and read in measured accents one of those beautiful poems which Lamartine wrote in his youth. She heard him, intent as disciples listened of yore to their teachers in the groves of Academe.

“I like it now,” she said.

“And why not before?”

“I cannot tell; perhaps because the day was too bright, and the sky was too blue.”

She picked up a fallen apple in the grass, and making a ball of it, she gaily tossed it up in the air until she was tired. He

watched her with quiet pleasure, until the sound of another carriage warned him to go.

"I envy you," he said; "you can stay here, and I must go to a hot room, and spend the whole evening there."

"And is there never pleasure in a hot room then?" asked Adèle.

"For some, there is, no doubt; not for me, I confess it."

Adèle leaned her cheek and her dimpled chin in her hand, and fixed her look like one in a dream.

"Oh! yes, it must be pleasant," she half involuntarily exclaimed; "the faces, the looks, the talking;—yes, one would like to know what it is like. Ah! bah!" she added, after a brief pause, and quickly consoled, as was the wont of her easy philosophy; "one is well out here, too. Good evening! I hope you may enjoy yourself, even in the hot room!"

She gave him a nod, picked up her apple, and resumed her pastime. Soon her light figure vanished among the orchard-trees. Reluctantly he bade adieu to its golden sky and its murmuring boughs through which the breeze passed so sweetly; reluctantly he exchanged these for the closeness of a drawing-room, and the faces of dinner-guests.

As he entered the large and old-fashioned, but handsome, red and gold saloon, Mr. Osborne caught a picture of the whole party in one rapid glance. Near the central table stood Mrs. Osborne graciously entertaining Monsieur Mazois, a fat and wealthy manufacturer. Arthur Mazois, his puny son, endeavoured to make himself agreeable to Anna, who shivered on a couch, answered him through her teeth—lest the cold should get in—and looked very like a little wax doll. Madame Mazois, a somewhat over-blown beauty, sat in a deep armchair, basking in her own radiance like a sunflower, whilst her three daughters, fine, fresh girls, with black eyes, white teeth, and pink dresses, received such attention as Monsieur de Launay could spare from Isabella, cool, haughty, like a princess, and looking very handsome in her mourning.

At the further end of the apartment, Capitaine Joseph—yellow, withered, and self-satisfied as usual—entertained—his hands behind his back—à la Napoléon—a little dry, brown lady, of some sixty years of age—who was no other than Madame de Launay—famous, and justly famous, in the French commercial world. Forty years before, she and her brother, Mathieu de Launay, had opened a poor ironmonger's shop in the town of St. Etienne. They were an obscure pair, uneducated, either of

them; yet Monsieur le Baron de Launay had died worth some millions; and Madame de Launay, his sister, was still really, though not ostensibly, the head of a large and honourable house of business. Mathieu had some mechanical talent, and his sister could have ruled an empire. He made a discovery, and she turned it to profit. Subtle, ambitious, persevering, prudent, she never rested until she made a rich man, a baron, and a deputy, of her brother, who had the docility and the good sense to let her do for him what he could never have done for himself. He was dead now, and his only son, Auguste de Launay, rivalled his father in deference and obedience; Madame de Launay was what she had ever been—the head of the family. Nothing in her manner or appearance justified, however, the position which she held. She was a little, withered old woman, with a quick eye and a short way of speaking. She had educated herself enough to pass in the world, and no more; and, to all seeming, knitting was the sole passion of her mind, and the chief occupation of her life. She now listened, with short nods, to the speech of Capitaine Joseph.

The stir produced by Mr. Osborne's appearance was comparatively slight. The French glide into such things, and do not make a labour of the pleasures of life. Every one present contrived to become acquainted, without effort, with the master of the house; and Mr. Osborne, who knew that he was in anything but distinguished society, the peerless Baron excepted, admired all the more this innate good breeding.

"I am so disappointed," whispered his stepmother; "Monsieur Joly, the Deputy, has sent in a note of excuse."

Mr. Osborne had not time to express a polite regret. Isabella came and took his arm, and led him to the Baron, who stood waiting, and looked magnificent, though affable—a sort of Louis XIV. without the full-bottomed wig. His self-satisfied condescension was insufferable to the silent pride of Mr. Osborne. Vain were the attempts of Isabella to create an impossible sympathy between her brother and her adorer. She assumed, moreover, a bold and grand style; she tossed her fair curls with a liberality; she rattled with a vehemence, as much put on as real, that highly displeased Mr. Osborne. He saw well enough that she was throwing herself at the head of a man who thought her a fine girl, and stopped there. Mr. Osborne endeavoured to check her, and failed. She would be dashing, original, and brilliant. Seeing this, he coolly left her, and introduced himself to Madame Mazois.

"And how do you like our little wild nook of a place?" asked, or rather lisped, that comfortable lady.

"I like it greatly."

"Is it possible!" cried the three Mademoiselles Mazois, turning up their eyes, and fanning themselves all at once.

"Why not?" he inquired.

They shook their heads, and still fanned themselves, whilst their mamma, who did not seem sure of what she ought to say, think, or do, or, indeed, of what she was, gave them a stealthy look.

"Yes," she said, vaguely, "yes; but there are—"

"No ideas," suggested her daughters, in a breath.

"No ideas," she said, much relieved.

"No ideas!" repeated her daughters; and again the three fans went on vigorously.

"How do people live?" asked Mr. Osborne.

"Live!" exclaimed the three fans, agitatedly, "they do not; they vegetate."

"They vegetate!" emphatically said Madame Mazois.

Mr. Osborne glanced at her corpulent person, and thought how comfortable vegetating must be. A side-look at the three plump and buxom Mademoiselles Mazois confirmed him in this opinion; but of course he consoled aloud with the misfortunes of four such intellectual ladies. The three fans assured him he could have no idea of the horrors they endured.

"None!" echoed their mamma.

And thus the conversation went on.

And now these preliminaries are over; the dinner-bell has rung; the guests are seated round a most inviting table, in the old stone Hall; and Mrs. Osborne, glancing at every luxury which the season allows and money can procure, excuses herself for the homeliness of the fare—when a piercing scream is heard. Every spoon dipped in soup is raised aloft in amazement. Madame Mazois—the blooming Madame Mazois—has sunk back in her chair, pale as death. She makes the sign of the cross. She once moved in humble life, and has retained popular customs, and agitatedly exclaims—

"Madame! we are thirteen at table!"

She rises in great haste, lest death should overtake her. Her three daughters turn crimson at mamma's vulgarity, and give her reproachful looks, which she does not heed.

Mrs. Osborne's keen blue eye runs round the table, and reckons quick as thought. It is too true.

"Ah! bah!" says Madame de Launay, "what matter!"

"Yes," says Capitaine Joseph, "what matter!"

More faintly the Baron echoes: "An idle superstition."

"I am so concerned!" says Mrs. Osborne, who is indeed annoyed at Madame Mazois's stupidity. "But the remedy is easy; Capitaine Joseph shall dine at a side-table."

"Delighted to do so," cries Capitaine Joseph, starting up with ready gallantry.

Vain kindness. Madame Mazois's nerves, though comfortably clothed in flesh, are sensitive; besides, she dreamed last night—her three daughters vainly long for a gag—of a wedding, certain sign of a funeral. In short, it is plain that Capitaine Joseph or some one else must leave the room.

Mrs. Osborne looked disturbed. She could not turn out her eldest son; she could not disoblige Madame Mazois; suddenly a lucky thought came to her. She whispered a few words to Capitaine Joseph; he nodded, vanished for a few minutes, then returned with a significant and satisfied smile, that said, "All right."

"In a few minutes," said Mrs. Osborne, "my blunder will be repaired. We shall have a fourteenth guest. Will that be right?"

"Oh! quite," replied Madame Mazois, whom she addressed, "quite;" but she would not sit down, nor yet eat her dinner, before the appearance of this promised fourteenth guest.

At length the door opened, noiselessly and partially; a little, white hand appeared, then quickly vanished; then it appeared again and was not withdrawn; then followed a clear, young face, and finally a small, dark-haired girl stood on the threshold of the room. With the solemn seriousness of a child she looked round the table, detected her vacant place between Madame Mazois and Capitaine Joseph, and glided into it with the dignity of a little duchess. A few looks she got which she received calmly, then she did what every one else around her was doing; she ate her dinner.

On recognising Adèle, Mr. Osborne gave his stepmother a look of severe surprise. She had done for her personal convenience what she had refused to do at his request. She had conferred a slight where he had meant a kindness. The truth was, that in her wish to oblige Madame Mazois, Mrs. Osborne had completely forgotten her stepson; but she was too sensible to try and repair her blunder by apology of look or speech. She returned his look with her sweetest smile, and let him think what

he pleased. His glance soon reverted to Adèle, opposite whom he sat, and who, with a pleased and happy smile, met his bow of recognition.

No one else minded her. Madame Mazois was too large to see so small an object. Capitaine Joseph was too much engrossed with helping the three pink beauties to every dainty, to give much attention to his little neighbour. The guests became merry; they talked, they laughed; but no one had a word for the young girl in the brown frock. She was left as much out of the gay speeches, the pretty flirtings, the witty jests and wise remarks that went on around her, as if she had not had eyes to see or ears to hear. The same exclusion followed her in the drawing-room upstairs. She sat in a deep recess, to which Mrs. Osborne had kindly taken her, giving her a book of sketches to amuse herself with; the book lay on the table, she bent over it engrossed, and no one came near her. Like a statue, she remained forgotten and apart. Yet she was young, prettier than any other girl present, and her quick eye and rosy lips looked as if she too could have taken up and thrown back the merry speech, and reply; but she wore a poor little brown frock! Irremissible sin.

"You were fortunate in finding so soon a fourteenth guest," said Mr. Osborne, turning to Capitaine Joseph who stood near him with his hands behind his back.

"Yes, was I not?" he complacently replied, taking to himself the whole merit of the transaction; "and the little thing was delighted to come too. She really is very pretty," he added, giving her a careless glance. "By the way," he resumed, confidentially, "I want you, who are a man of business, to advise me. Now which of the three Mademoiselles Mazois ought I marry. They are very much alike, and they have the same fortunes, and I really do not care which I have."

"Then find out which of the three will have you," drily answered Mr. Osborne.

Capitaine Joseph stared amazed. "Why, any of them will, any day I ask them," he said, with a smile of happy security; "but though I have been looking at them the whole evening, I cannot make up my mind which to take."

"Very awkward. Have you thought of this long?"

"Ever since dinner-time."

"And you have not made up your mind yet. I thought you were more decisive."

"Ah!" answered Capitaine Joseph, turning up his eyes with an emphatic smack of his lips, "if one of them were only like

the little girl at the table there beyond, I should not be so long about it. To tell you the truth, I like dainty little ladies, who look and sing like wild birds."

"Then why not try your fortune there?—do you fear a rejection?"

"A rejection! You are dreaming. She would jump to have me; but what should I do with her? She has no money—not a sou."

Here the attention of Capitaine Joseph was claimed and called away by the Baron.

"Poor child!" thought Mr. Osborne, compassionately looking at Adèle.

He stood by Madame Mazois. Her head had fallen back in her chair; her mouth was slightly open; Madame Mazois was fast asleep. Mr. Osborne smiled, rose, crossed the whole saloon, walked to the table by which the young girl sat, drew a chair nearer hers, and quietly sat down by her side. A rapid blush of pleasure rose to her cheek and overspread her whole face; her blue eyes beamed again, her whole aspect said, "I did not think you would come; I am glad."

At once the act was perceived, and commented upon by the whole room. The Mazois did not like it at all; Madame de Launay took a pinch of snuff. Anna, already indignant at the presence of Adèle, felt peevishly provoked. Isabella gave her brother and the young girl an ironical look, then turned back to Monsieur de Launay, who coloured slightly, and smiled.

"How do you like my sketches?" asked Mr. Osborne.

"Yours,—they are yours?" she exclaimed, amazed; "oh! how clever you are! How wonderful!"

He smiled.

"And have you seen all these places?" she cried.

"Every one of them."

And pleased to please one whose pleasures were so few—pleased to avenge her of all the slights and insolence she had received—he remained sitting there by her, describing, explaining, answering, and letting his stepmother's guests see how much he liked what they so fastidiously despised. This Adèle did not feel; but no one had ever spoken to her so before, with intellect, and thought, and suave courtesy, and friendly aspect too. She drank in fascination through every sense. She saw no face, she heard no voice, but his. Mr. Osborne was not so absorbed. He perceived that the guests were deserting the sa-

loon; they were passing through the little Gothic gallery on to the flight of steps that led to the moonlit garden.

"Shall we go too?" he asked, rising.

She assented eagerly. He wanted to take her arm; but, unused to these forms of society, and having always felt competent to walk without support, she darted down the steps with her usual vivacity. Mr. Osborne smiled.

"Dear little creature," said his stepmother, who alone had remained behind.

"She is a very charming girl," he replied, coldly. And he, too, descended.

Mr. Osborne had not time to look for Adèle; he was at once seized upon by Capitaine Joseph, who, taking hold of his right arm, led him into an alley, and asked, in a confidential whisper—

"Well, which of the three ought I take? I saw you looking at them."

"True; but I must look again. Where are they?"

"In the main alley. Look well this time!"

He released him; but scarcely was Mr. Osborne free, when Monsieur Mazois claimed his attention. Mr. Osborne submitted. They walked away in a retired alley, and Monsieur Mazois, after a lengthened prelude, spoke; and Mr. Osborne, with indignant surprise, thus learned what his stepmother had been busy about since her arrival—a business partnership between Mr. Osborne and the De Launays—and a matrimonial alliance between Isabella and the Baron were the theme on which Monsieur Mazois eloquently dwelt. As coldly and as civilly as he could, Mr. Osborne declined both proposals. A little stiffly, Monsieur Mazois begged that he would please himself, and apologizing for having troubled him so long, he let him go.

Mr. Osborne walked alone along a quiet path, and meditated over the communication he had just received. "Oh! weariness of life!" he thought, "wilt thou never cease!" He looked up. How beautiful was the night!—how serene were those dark blue heavens, where the moon sailed away over and beyond the mountains; how calm and pure looked that lake, in which another moon lay and slept, queen of a watery world below, as her sister was queen of the heavenly realm above. With a delight that thrilled through every fibre of his being, he looked from one to the other, and forgot all, save those two fair faces, that both seemed to say, "Leave us if you dare;—leave us if you dare." The turning of the path he was following suddenly brought him to the spot which, had he been less absorbed, he

would surely have shunned—the main alley, where all the guests were gathered in groups. The ladies glided along the moonlit path, and looked light and ethereal; the taller and dark figures of the men moved amongst them like spectral shadows; fragments of their broken speech, and the sound of their laughter, reached his ear. But Mr. Osborne neither heard the voice nor saw the figure of Adèle.

"Well, and what are you thinking of, melancholy Jacques?" said the light voice of Isabella at his side.

He looked up, saw her, and with her saw the Baron.

"A most lovely night," said the Baron, giving the evening his unqualified approbation.

"I want you two to give me a rowing on the lake," resumed Isabella, in her decisive way. "I have never been on a moonlit lake, and on one I must go."

Whilst she was speaking, Mr. Osborne caught sight of a little figure lingering alone and unheeded in the alley; and as it passed, he summoned it to his side, with the magic question—

"Would Mademoiselle Adèle like to go on the lake with his sister?"

"Oh! so much!" she exclaimed, eagerly; and at once she came forward.

Isabella drew herself up, and shivered, and said something about night air; but Mr. Osborne quietly overruled her, and though somewhat haughtily, Isabella submitted.

"Are you really not afraid of the chill breath of the lake?" objected the Baron, who had no great fancy for the task thus laid upon him.

"I fear nothing," said Isabella, a little indignant at what she considered his effeminacy.

"*Sans peur et sans reproche*," rejoined the Baron, sacrificing himself, with a smile and a bow.

They were within a few steps of the spot where Mr. Osborne's boat lay moored. Soon it was unfastened. Isabella entered it majestically; Adèle, with less dignity, sat down opposite her; then the two rowers took their places: a stroke of the oar, and the little craft flew away on the silent lake, and paused on reaching its centre.

Mountains enclosed them on every side, save that of the Manor. Above them hung the moon, full and clear; she touched with light a little village and its church, that lay to the left, and shone full on a white house to their right. It was a modern and elegant dwelling, with steps washed by the waters of the lake,

and large gardens around it, that filled the night air with their fragrance. Mr. Osborne looked at it fixedly, for a light burned in the drawing-room, and it was the house of M. Lascours. The Baron spoke.

"One of the handsomest women in the whole district lives there," he said.

"Yes; is she not handsome?" exclaimed Adèle, enthusiastically, "and so good, too."

Even in the pale moonlight Mr. Osborne saw her cheek flush, and he smiled at her ardour. He saw, too, M. de Launay bite his lip and look at her fixedly. A sound of voices rose from the garden. M. Lascours was talking to his wife.

"Do you wish to stay out, Alice?" he said.

"Which ever you please," was the low reply.

"Perhaps you would rather stay out."

"I have no wish either way."

"Let us go in, then."

And the speakers, invisible before, now appeared walking along the alley that led to the house.

"I did not know Monsieur and Madame Lascours were come back," said Monsieur de Launay, as the boat once more floated lightly on the waters.

No one replied; Mr. Osborne seemed very intent in looking at Adèle. She sat in a simple and naive attitude, with her hands folded on her knees, and her look fixed on the floating image of the moon in the lake. He smiled at her intent gaze, and Isabella saw the look and the smile, and curled her lip with scorn. "What fools men are," she thought. Suddenly Adèle started. The bell of the village church had wakened from its sleep, and was telling the hour.

"Eleven!" exclaimed Adèle, amazed when it ceased; "can it be eleven?"

"Why not?" asked Mr. Osborne, smiling.

"But I promised Jeannette to be with her at ten; she will be so tired."

"We will land you at once," said Mr. Osborne.

They rowed her to the steps; she alighted first, bade them a hasty good night, and vanished.

"There goes Cinderella," ironically said Isabella, landing in her turn. "I hope she has left no glass slipper behind."

"Oh, you truants!" said Mrs. Osborne, coming up to them; "where have you been, enjoying the delightful moonlight on the lake?"

"Delightful, indeed!" enthusiastically echoed the Baron.

"I thought you were cold," sharply said the fair Isabella.

Mr. Osborne heard no more: he saw the Mazois coming in a group, and quietly entered a secluded path.

It was half-past eleven when, with flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes, Adèle entered her room. Jeannette sat there waiting for her young mistress, and with a promptitude which would have justified the theory of those profound metaphysicians, who have discovered that hypocrisy is natural to the human heart, she assumed an air of sleep and fatigue, that said so plainly, "I am worn out with watching," that Adèle exclaimed—

"Poor Jeannette! why did you wait?"

"I did my duty," solemnly replied Jeannette; "I have been forty years in the family, and I hope I know my duty."

An expression of mingled alarm and ennui clouded the open face of the young girl.

"Oh, Jeannette!" she said, "you are going to preach and to be tiresome."

Jeannette snuffed, and looked highly offended.

"Mademoiselle need not be afraid," she said; "I know my duty; and since my old tongue troubles the ears of Mademoiselle, it shall be silent. I have only this to say, that never has such an insult been offered to the family of Courcelles as it received on this day, when Capitaine Joseph had the insolence to ask Mademoiselle Adèle to sit as fourteenth guest at Madame Osborne's table."

We once heard it said by a shrewd observer of life, that the sons and daughters of an ancient race, however humble of spirit or democratic of opinion they may be, never forget their origin. Adèle never thought of her birth, did not value it a rush, and fully merited the name of little Jacobin conferred upon her by Jeannette; but she had heard too often that she was descended from a noble line, that amongst her ancestors she numbered sovereigns, ever to forget facts so obvious.

"Ah, bah!" she said, gaily; "did I go amongst princes, or was there one there who can go back to Charles the Bold or Philip the Good?" "Wherever I sit is the head of the table," said the O'Donnell, and in the same spirit this little careless girl knew that where she went she conferred, and could not receive honour.

"Blood is blood, after all," thought Jeannette, struck with this reasoning, and looking admiringly at her spirited little mis-

treas; but unwilling to give in, she asked aloud if Mrs. Osborne had meant a politeness or an impertinence.

"Neither," quietly replied Adèle; "she asked me for her convenience—I went for my pleasure. And oh, Jeannette! I have so much to tell you."

Jeannette allowed herself to be mollified. She thought more of the dinner than she chose to say. It was long, indeed, since the kitchen of the Manor had emitted such a fragrance as had been extracted from it that evening by the potent alchémyst, the cook from Dijon. It was long since the old Manor had heard so much rustling of silk as had come to it around the ample persons of Madame Mozois and her daughters. Not that Jeannette knew much of the latter fact. "Mariette Mazois," as she had informed Jean, "was her nephew's gossip, a little barefoot chit of a thing, who used to run about on errands until old Mazois picked her up." Jeannette united the forefinger and thumb of her right hand, and raised them aloft with profound scorn: "Picked her up, I say, and married her. And now, Monsieur Jean, money rules the world, and because she feels faint and nervous, poor little Mamzelle Adèle must needs sit at the same table with her. Money rules the world."

And money, or the dazzling glow which money sheds, ruled Jeannette, as well as the world. She longed to know two things: how Mariette Mazois was dressed, her pride had not allowed her to ascertain the fact for herself, and if she still wanted her two front upper teeth, or had got them put in in Lyons. This intelligence Adèle could give, and Jeannette condescended to be good-tempered, and to observe that she was glad Mademoiselle had been entertained.

"Delighted, Jeannette," eagerly exclaimed Adèle; "Monsieur Osborne draws like an angel. I have seen all his sketches; he has been everywhere. Oh! what a wonderful man! And he took me on the lake in his boat."

"Alone?" asked Jeannette, frowning.

"No, with his sister, and the tall, fair man who calls on *cousine* sometimes."

"I am surprised Monsieur Osborne found so much time to bestow on *Medemoiselle*," drily said Jeannette, "considering there was no less a person present than Madame Mazois."

"Who is she?"

"A stout, vulgar-looking woman."

"I sat near a stout lady, and I think they called her Madame Mazois."

"Ah! she was splendidly dressed, I dare say."

Adèle did not know; she had not minded.

"And her teeth," persisted Jeannette, "did Mademoiselle notice her teeth?"

"What about them?" asked Adèle, opening her eyes at the question.

"She wanted two of the upper front ones in my time."

"She may want them still, for all I can say," carelessly replied Adèle; "but she seemed to make good use at dinner of those she has."

"She has got them in, no doubt about it," grumbled Jeannette. "Ah! well," she added, comforting herself with the reflection, "next year, please Heaven, I shall treat myself to a set of teeth."

Adèle burst into a merry fit of laughter; Jeannette drew herself up indignantly.

"Mademoiselle may laugh," she said; "but times are altered, indeed, since Louis the Wicked was master of Courcelles."

"I hope so," composedly interrupted Adèle; "Monsieur Osborne, the present master of Courcelles, seems anything but wicked."

"I am surprised," stiffly said Jeannette, "that Mademoiselle can think of comparing one of her ancestors to a gentleman who can let a Mariette Mazois sit at his table. Louis the Wicked, whom some called Louis the Devil, would have died before he allowed such a thing. Does Mademoiselle remember the story of his daughter Philippa's marriage? It is an example to all young ladies of good family."

"What about her, Jeannette?"

"She was beautiful, and she was proud. No one was good enough for her—not he—though many were the fine gentlemen who came to woo. Well, at length there came one with whom she fell over head and ears in love. They were wedded and lived happily together, until—how it was found out I cannot tell—my lord, Louis, her father, discovered that his daughter's husband was the son of a peasant. The husband did not wait for his account, but ran off, and my lady Philippa shut herself up in a turret, and vowed never again to see the face of man until her disgrace was avenged, for she had a proud spirit."

"Say a mean one, Jeannette," observed Adèle, with a smile of disdain; "a truly proud woman would be too proud to be ashamed of the husband she had taken, peasant or prince."

"My Lady Philippa did not think so," drily said Jeannette;

"nay more, my lord, her father, vowed to have no peace until he avenged his daughter. So he took his horse one morning and rode out alone."

"Like a Prince in the Fairy Tales," put in Adèle, who was not without a touch of the mocking French spirit.

"Like anything Mademoiselle likes," replied Jeannette; "but I scarcely think princes in the Fairy Tales do what Louis the Wicked did."

"Oh! Jeannette, if it is a horrible story, do not tell it to me," imploringly exclaimed Adèle.

"It is not very horrible," placidly replied Jeannette, "not at least for Louis the Wicked; for Mademoiselle surely remembers, that how when he defied and killed in single combat his enemy the Lord of Nantua, he insisted on having his heart."

"Oh! do not, do not!" exclaimed Adèle; "you know I hate those stories."

But Jeannette obstinately pursued:

"Well, my Lord Louis came back at the end of a year and a day, and on his horse, behind him, he carried a bag with which he went up to his daughter's turret. And there——"

"I tell you I will not hear the rest," cried Adèle, angrily, and stopping her ears with her fingers as she spoke. "I will not know what there was in that bag. I hate Philippa and Louis the Wicked."

"He was one of Mademoiselle's ancestors," gravely said Jeannette.

"I do not care about my ancestors," impatiently replied Adèle, "not a pin, and if I am to hear all the horrible things they did, I shall wish I never had any."

"If they had been quiet, well-behaved, vulgar people," said Jeannette, speaking, though she little knew it, like a modern school of history, "who would ever have heard about them? But it was because they were a fierce and cruel and a great family, that to this day mothers frighten children with their name."

"Shame on them, then," cried Adèle, her eyes sparkling with indignation, "to be remembered as a curse and not as a blessing, by the poor and the weak."

But Jeannette's prejudices were too deeply rooted to be so easily shaken.

"They were a great family, for all that," she said, and in insisting on that point, she forgot to draw, for the benefit of her little mistress, the obvious moral which the story of Philippa offered to all young ladies of good family: a moral of which

Adèle would never have understood the application to herself and the present evening.

CHAPTER XI.

A TRUST.

ADÈLE rarely dreamed; she slept with the sound, heavy sleep of youth. But on this night, the ivory gates were opened for her; she saw herself on the lake again, but alone in the boat with Mr. Osborne; whilst Alice, with thoughtful aspect and sad eyes, saw them floating away from her. Then the vision vanished; Italian skies, grey olive forests that skirted azure seas, wild and graceful hills where the orange ripened and the snow never slept, ruined temples by which brown men and women sat dreamily, passed before her, until she awoke with the feeling—"How delightful to travel."

"Her second thought was how many things she had to ask of Mr. Osborne when she saw him next. But Mr. Osborne was doubtless very busy. Not for that entire day did Adèle see him, not yet for the whole of the next. Was he gone again? She questioned Jeannette; the old servant at once replied that Monsieur Osborne was gone to Saint Etienne.

"How tiresome!" said Adèle, "will he soon come back?"

Jeannette shrugged her shoulders. How should she know?

"I dare say he will not be long away," resumed Adèle, who rarely looked at the dark side of things; and whilst waiting for his return, she amused herself with the books he had sent her.

Ten days had passed away. Adèle sat in the maze reading, when a sound of voices in one of the neighbouring alleys roused her. Mrs. Osborne was speaking in French to a speaker, like herself, invisible.

"No, no," she said, in her sweetest tones; "I cannot believe that you are so ignorant, Monsieur Morel; you must know more about this dreadful business."

To which the soft voice of Monsieur Morel replied—

"I have had the honour of assuring Madame that I know nothing."

"Nothing! yet I always understood you were a very close friend of my son Robert. My late husband said as much to me."

Monsieur Morel did not answer.

"Monsieur Osborne thought highly of your talents," she resumed, "and so does Robert.—Indeed, what am I saying?—we all think highly of you. And when I think upon it, it seems impossible to me that my son, though young and inexperienced, should be mixed in this dreadful matter. Has Monsieur Osborne mentioned the matter to you?"

"Surely Madame is aware that Monsieur is too ill for business."

"That is just why I feel, Monsieur Morel, that whilst my dear son William is so ill, I am in duty bound to interfere; and I know, that with your help—"

"Madame must excuse me; I am but a poor clerk—a machine in Monsieur Osborne's hands."

"Monsieur Morel," said Mrs. Osborne, suddenly changing her tone, "you ought to remember that times may change. What, if Monsieur Osborne's fever should take a fatal turn?"

"I shall then be in Madame's hands," was the submissive reply. And as it was uttered, the two speakers entered the last circle of the maze. Several times during this discourse Adèle had impatiently looked up from her book, and wished either that she was not where she was, or that the speakers, becoming conscious of her presence, would talk lower or go away: but towards the close of their brief dialogue, her book fell on her lap. What! Mr. Osborne was not gone to Saint Etienne! What! he was lying ill—dangerously ill in the house, and she knew nothing of it!

"I assure you, Monsieur Morel," resumed Mrs. Osborne, as they entered the harbour—She paused abruptly on seeing Adèle sitting on the stone step at the foot of the statue of Silence. Pale as death the young girl rose.

"What ails Monsieur Osborne?" she said; "is he ill? is he in danger?"

They both looked at her; Monsieur Morel with a strange smile—Mrs. Osborne with a surprised and half-thoughtful gaze.

"Monsieur Osborne is better," she said at length. "Good morning, Monsieur Morel!"

A wave of her white hand dismissed him without much ceremony. Monsieur Morel bent his head, and turned away. Mrs. Osborne went up to Adèle, and took her hand, and looked deep into her eyes.

"Poor little thing!" she said, kindly; "you are affected! we have all been sadly tried. My feelings"—she raised her

handkerchief to her eyes, but only for a moment—"have been such that I must not trust myself to speak on the subject. But you will be pleased to learn that your friend Monsieur Osborne is happily out of danger; and as he will be prudent, there is, I trust, no fear of a relapse. Come, are you happy? are you comforted?"

Adèle did not answer; she seemed in a dream. Mrs. Osborne kindly patted her cheek, pressed her hand, and with a gentle good morning! left her.

"Why did Jeannette deceive me?" thought Adèle; "what does all this mean? Is it true that he is safe?" She had sat down again; she started to her feet, and rapidly crossed the garden. Coming down the flight of steps that led to Mr. Osborne's room, she met Docteur Guillaume, a brisk, abrupt, dark, white-haired little man, who never said a kind word to a patient, and was nevertheless a sort of universal favourite. Adèle knew him well. She sprang towards him, and broke on him with the brusque enquiry—

"Docteur Guillaume, how is he?"

"Pooh! pooh! it is nothing. How are you, Mademoiselle Adèle? you look wild."

"Oh, I am well; but what has ailed him? do tell me, Docteur Guillaume."

She passed her arm within the old man's, and looked up coaxingly in his face.

"Do tell me," she entreated.

"Ah! bah! he is well enough now; he took cold on the lake, and was feverish."

"But he is safe now?" she asked.

"Ay, safe enough! I hope you are safe, Mademoiselle Adèle!" emphatically added Docteur Guillaume, withdrawing her arm from his, and walking away.

She remained amazed; and it was not until long afterwards that his meaning broke on her.

Mr. Osborne had taken cold on the lake, and cold had become strong fever. Every one knew it in the house save Adèle. Why had Jeannette concealed this from her? Clear, positive motives she certainly had; she was also out of temper with the whole affair. Louise had been called in to nurse Mr. Osborne; and though Jean had prudently asked and obtained a fortnight's leave of absence, Jeannette knew he was at the bottom of it all. Jeannette felt offended, and not disposed to humour other people. Nay, more, when Adèle, after parting from Docteur Guillaume,

entered the low store-room, where Jeannette sat spinning, and, pale with displeasure, asked why Jeannette had dared to deceive her in this, Jeannette very coolly replied—

"I knew what I was about."

Reproaches, passionate questions, mild adjurations wrung no more out of her. Still Jeannette said—"I knew what I was about." Then she rose; and as evening had set in, she lit the lamp. Soon after this, she left the room.

"Poor Monsieur Osborne," thought Adèle; "dear Monsieur Osborne! how much I love him, though I know him so short a time! How cruel it was, not to tell me he was ill! If I could have done nothing else, could I not have prayed for him to Almighty God, who despises not the meanest creature's prayers?"

The return of Jeannette interrupted her reflections. Jeannette's brow was so clouded, that Adèle at once cried—

"Jeannette, what is it?—Is Monsieur Osborne worse?"

"Monsieur Osborne is up and well enough," drily replied Jeannette; "but I never heard anything like it—never."

"Jeannette, what do you mean?"

"Well, then," desperately said Jeannette, "Monsieur wants to speak to you."

"To me!"

"Ay, there it is—to you, indeed. What can Monsieur want with Mademoiselle, at this hour, too?"

"He would not send for me if he did not want me," observed Adèle, decisively; "so let us go at once."

For some reason or other, Jeannette seemed quite subdued; and without opposing further resistance, she showed her young mistress the way. The night was dark, the garden was silent; they went along a lonely path until they reached the flight of steps that led to Mr. Osborne's study. Light glowed behind the red curtain that fell to the floor, and excluded the night air. Adèle raised it timidly, and without advancing looked in. Mr. Osborne did not see her. He sat writing at his desk; the light of the lamp fell on his face; it was pale and haggard, and looked to Adèle worn with trouble and care more than fever.

"May I come in?" she said, gently.

He looked up, saw her, and his face lit with pleasure. He attempted to rise, but Adèle did not give him time.

"I was so sorry that you had been ill," she said, a little eagerly; "I am so glad that you are well again."

But without seeming to have heard her, he said—

"I knew you would come; I knew I could send for you."

The earnestness of his tone surprised her; she raised her eyes to his, as much as to say "of course," and sat down on the chair near his, to which he pointed.

Mr. Osborne was going to speak, but looking up, he saw Jeannette standing by the door, and he said quietly—

"Wait in the next room, Jeannette, I want to speak to Mademoiselle Adèle alone."

Jeannette looked at Adèle; the young girl ratified the order with a smile; they remained alone. But Mr. Osborne did not speak; he sat with his brow leaning on his hand, and his eyes fixed on vacant space, like one absorbed in thought. "He has forgotten all about my being here," thought Adèle, amused; but he had not, for at that very moment he looked at her and said with a smile—

"It seems pleasant to see you again, Mademoiselle Adèle; have you been well?"

"Oh, I am always well," she replied, gaily.

"And always gay and merry—happy little thing! I wish I were like you."

"And why are you not?" promptly asked Adèle.

"It would take days to answer that question, and even then you would not understand the true reason."

"Am I, then, so stupid?" asked Adèle, nettled.

"Stupid!" echoed Mr. Osborne, looking half shocked; "my dear child, never use that word in conjunction with yourself." A little blush of pleasure rose to the cheek of Adèle; her blue eyes beamed, her happy lips parted with a half smile. "He thinks me clever," she thought, delighted, for she had the weakness, if weakness it be, to love the praise of one whom she admired. Other thoughts occupied Mr. Osborne. He looked at her very earnestly, and with unusual gravity he said—

"Mademoiselle Adèle, I have known you but a very short time, yet this I know of you—you are sincere and true. If you can oblige me in the way I shall mention, you will do so; if not, you will say so at once."

Oblige him! Adèle looked the surprise she did not speak. He smiled and sighed.

"Aye, it seems strange," he said, "and stranger will it seem, I dare say, when you have heard me out. What I want of you is this: to find me a trusty messenger who will post this letter for me before to-morrow evening, a messenger on whom you can rely, and who will neither know nor guess by whom the letter is written. I am surrounded by friends, by relatives, and servants;

it seems strange to apply to you, yet necessity leaves me no choice: do you think you can oblige me thus far?"

"I can," deliberately replied Adèle, and she was too delicate to add any comments.

He handed her a sealed letter, which lay on the table before him, and said with a sad smile—

"I see you wonder—well you may. The experience of a few years will, however, teach you the value of mistrust. I hope, for your sake, the knowledge may come late,—very late. If any mischance should prevent your messenger from fulfilling this errand, you need not take the trouble of returning this letter; burn it—it will be useless. I have but one remark to add: should any one know or suspect the kindness you are going to render me, this letter will never reach its destination."

"No one shall know it," decisively said Adèle, "not even Jeannette."

"Who must be wondering at our secret conference," said Mr. Osborne, smiling, "and therefore I shall not detain you."

Adèle rose; he leaned back in his chair, pale and wearied. She put the letter in her pocket, turned away, and came back.

"This letter is very important?" she said, looking at him fixedly.

"Very important indeed," he gravely replied.

Adèle said no more. She called Jeannette, who appeared, looking strangely perplexed. On the threshold the young girl turned to give Mr. Osborne a significant smile; then she lightly descended the stone steps, and was once more in the garden.

"Monsieur did not hold a long conversation with Mademoiselle," said Jeannette.

"He had little to say," was the brief reply. "How altered he is; did you notice, Jeannette?"

Jeannette had noticed nothing particular. Of course, when people had been nine days ill with fever, they must be a little altered; but Jeannette had seen nothing beyond that. Adèle did not insist,—indeed, she said no more, but went straight up to her own room.

She locked her door, an unusual precaution, and taking the letter from her pocket, she looked at it earnestly.

It was a plain letter, with a plain seal, and directed, in a tremulous hand, to William Smith, Esq., Farringdon Street, London. It had been written on a sick bed, in the vigils of fever, whilst the wearied watcher slept, and in its few lines lay a whole sad tale of mistrust and treachery. "Poor gentleman!"

thought Adèle; "is there, indeed, no one in this whole house in whom he can confide?—No one but me—a little girl!" But her heart beat and her cheek flushed, as she remembered his words: "You are sincere and true."

CHAPTER XII.

THE LETTER.

ADÈLE meant to be her own messenger. This resolve was so opposed to all the laws of decorum and etiquette which surround a French girl, that Mr. Osborne never dreamed she would take it. But she did not merely take it, she acted upon it.

No great difficulty attended the task. A short distance divided the Manor from the village of Courcelles, where there was a post-office; the road was straight and easy; to go there and come back might take an hour.

The day, which had been dark from the morning, cleared as it advanced, and the last clouds rolled away from the mountains and left the sun shining in a blue sky when Adèle emerged from the Manor on the high road. It was wild and lonely, but safe; it wound between the mountains and the lake, guarded by the arid peaks of one, and bounding the silent waters of the other. Wite a light step and a light heart Adèle walked on.

Now and then she turned from her path to climb up the rocks and gather the gorgeous yellow and purple flowers that grew in their crevices, and she paused for a moment as the turning road showed her views of mountain and lake, wilder and more beautiful than those with which she was already familiar, but otherwise she did not linger. She met a few cars laden with long felled trees, from which the yellow leaves drooped half withered; a few hunters going up to the mountains; a few peasants trudging along the road. Some passed on without minding her, others looked at her curiously, for she had always lived in such seclusion that her name alone was known; but Adèle heeded neither, and went on her way careless and fearless. She rested but once. A little out of the way stood a solitary dwelling, with doors and shutters closed. Its back was to the mountain, against which it was built; trees shaded its roof; its front was to a grass-

grown path, hemmed in between wild hedges, enclosing on either side wilder patches of neglected garden; desolate was the aspect of the deserted dwelling.

Adèle sat down on a low, flat stone at the angle of the path, and looked at it, and wondered why men reared their homes in sad places, when the beautiful earth had so many lovely spots. She gathered a bunch of wild clematis from the hedge, and went on. At length a few straggling houses announced the vicinity of the village. A white-washed inn, with its tempting sign of two stiff, staring men, holding glasses full of red wine, and the enticing invitation "*entrons-y, let us go in,*" written underneath them, came first; then a blacksmith's forge, where a patient-looking, grey horse was waiting to be shod, followed. A group of straight, quaint houses, gathered like gossips around an antique wall, next appeared, with the usual accompaniment of women, in short petticoats, standing in the gloom of their ancient doorways, and brown children playing and quarrelling in the sun. Adèle passed through them without stopping; and soon afterwards, she reached and entered the long winding street called the Bourg de Courcelles. It had been a warlike place when ruled by the warlike men from whom Adèle was descended, but like the ancient family, it had dwindled away, and was now little better than an obscure village lost in the activity of a manufacturing district.

Picturesque as painter's eye need wish was that street. It rose in stairs, and on either side the uneven outline of its tall houses was cut on a background of barren mountains. Hot sunshine scorched the red-tiled roofs, but dark shadows lurked under every deep gable, and a cool gloom lingered around the stone porches and arched windows below. A few dingy shops caught, without arresting, the eye of Adèle; and when she at length paused before one, it was because that shabby stationer's window, where dingy letter-paper, and faded wax, and yellow quills were vainly spread to make a show, was also the post-office. In the act of holding her letter above the box, Adèle gave a glance at the interior of the shop. It was narrow and dark; behind the counter sat a thin and haggard-looking man with a furrowed brow and a sunken eye. He sat back with his hands in his pockets, staring with a listless, gloomy air that struck her. But she gave him no more than a glance—no more than the time it took her to hold her letter above the slit and let it fall into the box. This done, she walked away without looking back.

"How easy it was, after all," thought Adèle, as after leaving the village behind her, she walked along the solitary road. "He

thought so much of posting that letter, and seemed so anxious about it—why, it was nothing at all.”

A few large round drops of rain on the dusty flags at her feet roused her from these reflections. She looked up; in a few moments the whole aspect of the day had changed; a black and heavy cloud was passing across the sky, and with its reflection it darkened the narrow lake and surrounding mountains to her right. To her left rose mountains less steep, but that sloped away in wild, rugged gorges, where green torrents foamed and roared as they broke angrily over the rocks, or gurgled in the dark and narrow caverns through which they passed. One of these stood but a few yards distant from the roadside. Its overhanging rocks promised shelter during the shower, and Adèle was too much of a mountaineer to fear its yawning gloom, or to care for the hollow murmurs of its invisible waters. She entered it; and scarcely had she passed its stone threshold, when the white, slanting rain came pouring down behind her. She looked round; the opposite mountains were already clad in mist, and the surface of the still dark lake was troubled and broken with a thousand circles. But not one of the drops that splashed on the road could reach her; and smiling at her security, Adèle sat down on a fragment of rock, and looked up at the swift clouds drifting in the sky above, like storm-beaten ships on a rolling sea.

She had not sat and looked long when the sound of a slow trudging step on the road, roused her. She peeped out and saw a dark figure coming towards her, under the shelter of a large cotton umbrella. At once she drew back, and quietly stepped behind a projection of rock. She had recognized the awkward and slouching gait of M. François Morel, and did not care to be seen by him. He passed the cavern without raising his eyes from the earth; she looked after him until a winding of the road hid him from her sight. He was going from the Manor to the village whence she had just come. How strange that he could not have been Mr. Osborne's Messenger. “If he does not trust him, why does he keep him?” thought Adèle with the logic and ignorance of youth. She did not think of it long.

The rain still fell heavily, and the cavern that sheltered her was a strange wild place. She rose and cautiously explored it; but she soon paused; it ended in a pit, it might be but a few feet deep, it might pierce the very bowels of the mountains, for all she could see. She knelt down by the brink of its abyss-like chasm, and bending—she listened intently. She saw nothing below her but darkness, no glimmer of waters shivering through the gloom,

nothing but depths, whence rose, like a voice of discontent, the rush of the torrent. She took a pebble and dropped it in; it splashed with a hollow sound that echoed again and again until all once more was silent, and Adèle heard nothing but the rain rushing past on the sweeping wind, for it still rained. In vain she looked up at the sky for some light spot, some blue space; the greyness of the clouds had spread every where, and gloom hung like a dome above the mountains. There was nothing for it but patience, and patiently Adèle waited, whilst time passed on, and heavier fell the pouring rain and darker grew the day now drawing to a close.

"I shall have to walk home through the rain after all," thought Adèle, after waiting well nigh an hour. "Ah! bah! what matter—I shall be wet, and Jeannette will grumble, and that will be the worst of it. I wish I had Monsieur Morel's big umbrella."

Scarcely had the wish crossed her thoughts, when umbrella and owner entered the cavern.

Adèle had that presence of mind which is but another name for courage. She was sitting in the gloom; Monsieur Morel had not seen and might not see her. To stir was to make a noise and be discovered. She remained perfectly still, quietly relying on the chance of his not turning round; if he did, he could but see her; if he did not, all was right.

But Monsieur Morel seemed to have enough to do in looking at the rain and grumbling at it, though alone. Next followed the task of shaking his dripping umbrella and opening it out to dry; then, as the rain still continued, he sat down on the same rock, at the opening of the cavern, where Adèle had first sat, and, less patient than she had been, he wiled away the time with looking over the contents of his pocket book. Adèle could just catch a glimpse of his bent face, and thought she had never liked its meaning less. By the time Monsieur Morel had leisurely examined the heap of large and small papers which his pocket book contained, the rain had ceased a little; at once he availed himself of the opportunity. He rose, stamped his wet feet, buttoned up his great coat, seized his umbrella, and once more trudged away. He left the cavern without having once looked round.

Adèle had not felt afraid, yet she felt relieved, when he was gone. She left the place where she had been sitting, and walked to the front of the cave; Monsieur Morel had already disappeared.

"I wonder why I dislike him," remorsefully thought Adèle,

Adèle, as she stepped in. He awoke with a start, and seeing her by the doubtful light of his lantern, he took her for a child.

"Little girls are always in a hurry," he half grumbled. And he rowed her across without another word.

Adèle handed him his money, stepped out on the opposite bank, and found herself in the centre of a small and badly built town; but she had been there before, and though she missed her way twice, she ended by finding herself opposite the post-office.

A flourishing, gaslit grocer's shop was this, with a florid widow sitting behind the counter. Her weeds set off her blooming complexion, her frank and open face at once inspired Adèle with confidence; her hand was on the door to enter and ask her the hour for the next post, when the sight of Monsieur Morel entering the shop by another door made her start back.

He went up to the post mistress, with his readiest bow, and was graciously received like a familiar acquaintance, then leaning on the counter, he spoke. Adèle saw the widow listen with surprise and alarm in her good-humoured face; then she clasped her hands and turned up her eyes and shook her head; finally she rose, took a key from her pocket, opened the letter box, and spread its contents before M. Morel.

But in vain he turned them all over; that which he wanted was not among them; again the widow put them away, but even as she did so, she turned round and spoke. Her look, her whole aspect implied an emphatic promise. Monsieur Morel smiled and bowed, and left by the door by which he had entered.

The rain had again begun to fall, the street was suddenly deserted, but Adèle stood still in the same spot, like one charmed or dreaming. What tale had he told the poor mistress, Adèle knew not, but she had little doubt of its purport. It could concern nothing but the letter she was carrying! What to do she could not imagine. She stood irresolute and perplexed, when a light two-wheeled car drove up to the post-office. Mechanically Adèle drew back to let the driver enter the shop. He passed by her, dripping with wet, and she saw by his attire that he was a postman. But wet though he was, her young face, as she stood in the gas light, with her letter in her hand, caught his attention. He saw her standing there like one perplexed, and he thought her troubled about being late.

"Put it in the box behind the car," he said, good-humouredly, "and it will go all the same."

"Where to?" eagerly asked Adèle.

"That will depend upon the direction, my dear," jocularly replied the postman.

"But where will this car take it?"

"To Dijon, to Paris, to the end of the world if you like."

He entered the shop and closed the door behind him. Adèle looked at the car; it was the government post. At the back, above a narrow slit, she read, in yellow letters, the intimation that it was for home and foreign letters: still she hesitated.

"Have you not made up your mind yet?" asked the postman, coming out with the bags. "Because," he added, lightly springing on the seat, "I have made up my mind to be off."

The car rapidly rolled away; Adèle watched it till it vanished, then breathed relieved. Her task was over; the letter was gone.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE GLOVE.

THE storm was at its height.

"Oh! that horrid lightning!" moaned Anna.

"Sublime! magnificent!" murmured Isabella, who stood by one of the windows of the Hall looking on. Her arms were folded, her brow was knit—Isabella was in an attitude, and in one of her grand moods.

The two sisters were alone, and, as usual, ready to quarrel.

"I wish you would shut those shutters," said Anna.

"Oh! Night and darkness, ye are lovely," began Isabella, but Anna was in no mood for Childe Harold. She rose and deliberately closed the shutters in her sister's face. Isabella laughed scornfully, and did not deign to lose her temper.

"I tell you I am not going to be used so," said Anna, with sparkling eyes. "I know there is something going on, and that I am kept out of it."

"There is a storm going on," ironically replied Isabella, "and you shut the shutters; what about it?"

"You understand me well enough!" resumed Anna, more angrily than before, "and you shall not get out of it so. I tell you there is something going on, and that I am kept out of it."

"Very wisely," coolly put in Isabella.

"Wisely or not, I am not going to stand it. I asked William for a twenty-pound note this morning, and I shall know why he would not give me some of my father's money."

"I thought Pa was dead, and that it was William's money now," observed Isabella.

Anna darted an angry look at her, but did not reply. Isabella pursued—

"Poor William! a nice, pleasant, comfortable time he must have of it. Every one has a pull at him, from Robert, whose pulls are no trifle, to Anna, who coolly asks for a twenty-pound note."

"Robert! what has Robert been doing?" sharply asked Anna.

"You may as well know it," replied Isabella, with a yawn,—
"Robert has been drawing I know not how many thousands. I know it, because Ma left her desk open, and I saw the letter, in which he said he did not know why there was such a bother made about the money, and that—"

"I shall thank you not to proceed," here said the voice of Mrs. Osborne. She had entered unheard, and stood before her daughters cold and angry. But little cared either the haughty Isabella or the selfish Anna for maternal displeasure. And to do the dispassionate Mrs. Osborne justice, her displeasure did not last. Having been so foolish as to leave her desk open, she really could not wonder at the liberty Isabella had taken. The only thing was to be more careful another time, lock her desk, and keep her keys in her pocket. But though she felt no more anger than surprise, she thought it proper to assume a dignified wonder.

"I am astonished!" she began, sitting down, and laying on the table the little portable desk she had brought in with her. "I did not think one of my daughters could have stooped to such an action."

"Surely, Ma, you ought to know me by this," began Isabella; "you know that when I find a thing convenient—"

"But I want to know what Robert has been doing with our money?" interrupted Anna; "I am not going to be kept in the dark by the whole of you."

"Robert," said Mrs. Osborne, in a feeling tone, "has been behaving as I never thought my son could behave. He has been betraying the confidence of the most generous of brothers—"

"You need not, Ma," sarcastically interrupted Isabella—
"William is not here."

A little flush rose to Mrs. Osborne's brow ; to be understood and penetrated was what she could least bear, but she feigned deafness, and went on—

"Of a brother who is sacrificing his tastes, his health, his private feelings, to our welfare."

"And who would not give Anna a twenty-pound note this morning," again interrupted Isabella, determined to make a scene.

"You have been asking money of William?" sharply said Mrs. Osborne, turning to her daughter.

"Of course I have," sulkily replied Anna, "and so have you."

Mrs. Osborne bit her lip, and turned scarlet. Anna had, without knowing it, told the truth, and touched on a sore point.

"Poor William!" ejaculated Isabella, compassionately. "I alone, I believe, ask nothing from him."

Mrs. Osborne turned her cold blue eye on her daughter, and said, frigidly—

"Isabella, go up to your room, and read your Bible."

"Thank you, Ma: but I fear I should not profit by your kind advice."

"I fear so, too," coldly said Mrs. Osborne; "nevertheless, follow the advice, even though you should not profit by it. Both William Osborne and your mother shall prefer you to be so engaged to entertaining a clandestine correspondence with a man who, if he meant well, would never presume to write to you without the knowledge of your family."

The lips of Isabella parted to utter a reply, but none came forth; she seemed overwhelmed. Her mother pursued—

"That the Baron means or intends evil I do not say; he neither would nor dare; but he found you free; and Frenchmen are not accustomed to so much freedom in young girls. It amused him to write to you, and you allowed it; but William, warned by me, has put an end to his amusement and to your folly. The Baron has apologized, withdrawn—and not proposed."

The last words, uttered slowly and deliberately, were meant to sting. Rarely did Mrs. Osborne permit herself such a display of temper; but Isabella had irritated her out of her usual calmness; and it was with something like vindictive triumph that she turned on her daughter, and taunted her with her defeat.

"William shall be answerable to me for all this!" cried Isabella, passionately starting to her feet.

But Mrs. Osborne extended her white hand, and coldly and calmly laying it on her daughter's arm, she said—

"You shall not go near William; he has been ill; ill he is

still. His health is too precious to us all to be disturbed by your caprices. I say that you shall not go."

Her touch was light; but had physical force been needed to prevent Isabella from going near her brother, Mrs. Osborne would have used it in that hour; and for once, her will, stronger than her daughter's at all times, prevailed, and had authority.

Isabella sat down, red and indignant. Mrs. Osborne opened her morocco desk, and Anna querulously exclaimed—

"But I want to know about the money! What has Robert been doing with our money? I want to know that."

A flash of lightning and a loud peal of thunder that shook the house, suggested Mrs. Osborne's reply.

"To-morrow morning will be a better time for explanation," she said, coldly. "I confess this storm has affected my nerves, so that if I can get through my two letters, I shall think myself fortunate."

Anna murmured impatiently to herself, but did not insist. Mrs. Osborne wrote with a rapid pen, folded her letters, sealed and directed them, and having locked up her desk, walked out of the room. Isabella raised her head and listened; the whole house was still; the storm was dying away; the far wind alone murmured on the mountains beyond the lake. She looked at Anna; Anna had fretted herself into a doze, in her chair.

Isabella smiled scornfully, rose, and with noiseless step left the room. She went up straight to her mother's apartment and tapped at the door. She received no reply; unhesitatingly she opened it, a light burned on a table, but the room was vacant. Isabella turned away, descended the staircase, crossed the court, and entered the garden.

The darkness of night covered the avenue she followed; rain drops fell on her bare head from the quivering trees; treacherous pools of wet waylaid her lightly-covered feet: but Isabella heeded nothing; on she went, until she reached the foot of the stone staircase that led to her brother's study. There she paused and listened: a sound of subdued voices soon reached her ear. She recognized the low tones of William, the soft voice of her mother, and, without waiting for thought or reflection, she swiftly ascended the flight of steps, and paused on the last, on the very edge of the white circle of light shed from the lamp within. The rain again began to fall, the distant thunder again rolled in the mountains, but Isabella did not care; the glass door was half open, the red curtain was withdrawn, she could hear and see, and be neither seen nor heard.

More she did not want.

They sat facing one another; Mrs. Osborne near the door, her stepson opposite it; between them a table covered with papers.

"My dear William," she said, in her most persuasive tones, "you will kill yourself. Remember how positively the doctor has forbidden exertion."

"I have not left my room yet."

"Mental exertion, I mean, and he meant too."

"To write or answer a few insignificant letters cannot be called mental exertion."

He spoke coldly and briefly. She sighed and resumed:

"With regard to that most unfortunate matter, about Robert, if you think that my interference could avail, that my maternal advice and remonstrances would produce any effect—"

"My dear madam, I am obliged to you. But have we not already discussed this matter? When the guilt of Robert is proved to us, let us act by all means. To stir before would be useless. Nay," he added, with a smile of some irony, "it would be unjust to your son and my brother."

"Heaven knows I do not wish to believe my poor boy guilty," said Mrs. Osborne, raising her handkerchief to her eyes.

"And what do we know, after all?" pursued Mr. Osborne; "what reports, false perhaps, have told us, or rather you! Prudence, common justice command us not to heed them."

Mrs. Osborne murmured something about his being all consideration, and beaten on this point, she withdrew her handkerchief.

"With regard to that matter about Isabella," she said, "I know not what to say."

"Isabella is a fool," impatiently replied Mr. Osborne, "and she must have her way. For me to interfere would be to expose her and make an *éclat*. If the Baron never writes more dangerous matter than that absurd letter you showed me—where is the harm? Of course, he will never marry a girl who has not got a farthing in the way of dot; but surely Isabella knows that as well as you and I do. And how can I—in common honesty—assume an alarm and an indignation I do not feel?"

"Then, you decline interfering?"

"I think interference not needed. Isabella's peace of mind is not menaced; in every respect I consider her safe, under your keeping."

"I hope, I trust she is," was the mournful reply; "but I thought that her elder brother—Well—well—" she added,

breaking off as she noticed the expression of impatience and ennui that passed over her stepson's face, "I say no more. Isabella must be left to herself. With regard to Robert, I cannot help thinking that my presence might act as a useful check, and I have come to the resolve of going to England at once."

Mr. Osborne looked neither moved nor surprised. His calm, white face betrayed nothing of what he felt, if indeed he felt anything on hearing this announcement. He merely said:

"Of course, you take my sisters with you?"

Mrs. Osborne looked up at him with a doubtful glance, that seemed to say: "Is there no getting out of that?"

And his quiet look in the same language, replied: "None."

A long pause followed.

"What is she up to now?" thought Isabella, looking at her mother.

Mrs. Osborne sat looking down with a calm fixedness that gave to her fair and handsome face the quiet, intent expression which ancient art has bestowed on Venus fishing. But she soon raised her eyes, and fixing them on Mr. Osborne's face, she said, gently:

"William, before I leave, I must speak to you on a subject of some importance. You will remain alone in this house with a very young girl: Mademoiselle Adèle de Courcelles."

"What about her?" he sharply asked.

"Nothing, if the subject be displeasing to you."

Mr. Osborne moved restlessly in his chair, and certainly did not look pleased, but he controlled himself and replied:

"Pray go on."

Mrs. Osborne looked in his face with a doubtful hesitating expression, that gave more force to her words.

"William, mind I do not put a question, I merely make a remark. If you mean to marry her—"

She stopped short, silenced at once by the indignant severity of her stepson's look.

"You amaze me," he said, frigidly. "I have yet to learn what part of my conduct towards this young girl, a mere child too, has authorized so extraordinary a construction."

"You are angry with me," sweetly said Mrs. Osborne, "yet without cause. Would I have touched on so delicate a subject, but for the poor motherless child's sake! She is young; a mere child, pretty and thoughtless. You have paid her some attention, you have shown her some kindness; she may conclude—"

"That I wish her well," he drily interrupted; and he more

drily added, "Allow me to say that she will conclude nothing else."

"She will not imagine that you are attached to her?"

"I think too highly of her penetration, to fear that."

"But what if she should become attached to you herself?" resolutely observed Mrs. Osborne.

Mr. Osborne was too proud to be vain, he was also tolerably sceptical; he did not, and he would not think himself a dangerous man; but unable to suppress a sarcasm, he replied:

"Ah! if I had to deal with one of your over-sensitive girls, like Isabella, I should indeed be careful; but with a flinty little thing, like Mademoiselle Adèle, where is the danger?"

Mrs. Osborne smiled a slow, sad smile, and with a gentle shake of the head, she said:

"Well, William, vanity is not one of your faults."

But the compliment did not mollify Mr. Osborne; and with a half frown, and a cold, displeased look, he said briefly:

"My dear Madam, I like and respect Mademoiselle de Courcelles too much to hear any more on this subject."

Mrs. Osborne rose, and laying her left hand on the table, whilst her right gathered around her the folds of the heavy shawl in which she was wrapped, she said, with a tone, and in an attitude of calm dignity:

"Excuse me, William; you must hear more. I cannot let this matter pass thus. Advice, warnings you deride; facts, whether you believe them or not, you must hear. I spoke in half speech, out of regard to female delicacy—I now speak in plain language. That young girl loves you!"

Mr. Osborne gave an indignant start, and with unusual vehemence, he exclaimed:

"I do not believe it! It is impossible!"

"Be it so," coldly said Mrs. Osborne. "Forget my words; I dreamt what I saw and heard. I spoke under the influence of a delusion, of a design if you will. Proofs I certainly will not give; say if you like, and think too, that I cannot. Let it be. For the first and last time, we have spoken on this subject. Good night."

She bent her head with stately grace, moved towards a door, and was gone.

"Oh! my mother you are a clever woman," admiringly thought Isabella. "The fate of business, a sister's peace could not bait the fish, vanity, a pretty girl's love will do it."

She drew nearer the glass door and looked in at her brother.

He was leaning forward with his brow on his hand; it was contracted with an anxious thought, and he bit his nether lip.

"Ay, she has left him something besides letters and business to think of," murmured Isabella; "let her and let him fall into the miserable trap, into the hollow delusion that a girl of sixteen is dying for a man of thirty. Let him, I say. I liked him; alone I asked nothing from him; and he has repaid my liking with indifference and scorn. I will not utter a word—I will not lift a finger to save him."

She descended the steps, and walked back through the garden triumphant at all she had heard.

"I will not go to England," thought Isabella, "that's flat; nor yet will I stay here. There's going to be a crash in the business, that is very clear. What need I care? they may think what they like; before it comes I shall be Madame la Baronne."

"It is impossible," thought William Osborne; "I cannot, I will not believe it."

But though it was impossible, though he could not and would not believe it, the words he had heard had left a sting behind, a sting which no hand could pluck away—the sting of doubt and uncertainty.

He liked Adèle—very much did he like her; but from the shadow of any other feeling he was free. He liked her as a graceful child, fresh, original, and piquant. He liked her own liking for himself, that liking which shone in her dark blue eyes at his approach, which spoke in her joyous laugh, and beamed in her whole aspect. But because he liked those things, in themselves both lovely and innocent, was love, the tormentor of youth—was passion, destroyer of the beauty and freshness of life, to come between them? To both he had long bidden farewell, and of neither did he like to think in conjunction with Adèle; for where love reigns, must vanish the light charm of the child; and though Adèle was pretty, and sixteen, never once had Mr. Osborne thought of her as a woman; never once had he thought of love and her together. It would have seemed cruel to him, cruel and wicked as a profanation; for even as Holiness and Purity surround the Madonnas of Raffaele, spite all their beauty, so around some beings there flows an atmosphere of careless innocence, sweet like that which breathes around childhood or the wild flower; a thing beautiful, indeed, but too tender and too frail to be plucked, and which seems to say to the outstretched hand—"Gather me not."

"It is impossible," he thought again, and impatiently he rose

and walked about the room; "and even if it were so," replied an inner voice, "the time of love and faith is for ever gone by for you; let the young love the young, and leave the wearied to rest."

Mrs. Osborne knew well enough that though the thought she had left her stepson might absorb him, it would lead him to no such dangerous step as marriage. He was the last man to be flattered by the love of a girl of sixteen; he was the last man to allow pity or vanity to delude him. What had he to do with the feelings that agitate only in the springtime of life? He had loved, been deceived, and this wreck of the lover's fondness and the husband's trust had left him no wish for a third venture. He liked his life as it was, and there seemed to be no room in his heart for the feelings that bind man to woman, and through woman to home.

"I know it is not so," he thought; "but even if it were, is it because I think a flower fresh and beautiful that I must gather it? Let it remain on its stem, let it be worn in the bosom of some happy lover; where love is quick to come, it is quick to depart; but I will never believe it—never."

"May I intrude on Monsieur?" said a submissive voice.

Monsieur Morel stood before him, wet and dripping.

"What news?" asked Mr. Osborne, sitting down.

"I posted the letters Monsieur gave me, and I found none."

"None!—That is odd, is it not, Monsieur Morel?"

Monsieur Morel shrugged his shoulders, and merely said the word "Patience."

"But you posted the two letters I gave you?" resumed Mr. Osborne, after a pause.

"Monsieur gave me three letters," said Monsieur Morel.

"Two you mean."

"Monsieur gave me three letters," persisted the foreman.

Mr. Osborne gave him a fixed look, but said not one word; and, taking up his pen, he began to write.

"Two letters, Monsieur Morel," he said, after a pause.

"Monsieur gave me three letters," insisted Monsieur Morel, with a sickly smile.

"And pray what did you do with those three letters?" asked his patron, mistrustfully.

"I posted two, the third I had the misfortune to lose."

"How, and where?"

"In the grotto of the Witch. I had entered it to take refuge from the storm; I opened my pocket-book to feel sure that all was

right, and I found the three English letters Monsieur had given me. The rain having ceased, I went on; when I arrived at the post-office of Courcelles, I found that one of the three letters was missing. Accordingly, I posted the other two."

"Which were they?" interrupted Mr. Osborne.

"One was for Johnson and Co., the other for Walker."

"And the third—the lost one?"

"I did not look at the direction of that letter."

"Why so, Monsieur Morel? Why exempt that one, when you so accurately noted the other two?"

"Because it was only when the third one was lost that I looked at these two."

"A great pity, Monsieur Morel—a great pity; if you had only examined the letters a little more curiously whilst you were in the grotto of the Witch waiting for the rain to stop, see how useful we might find it now."

A sarcastic smile curled Mr. Osborne's lip as he spoke, and a scornful light shone in his dark eye.

"I beg Monsieur's pardon, over and over," humbly said the foreman; "I have been remiss, negligent, but how could I suppose that this unfortunate letter would be lost? And yet, let me see—I think I did look at it—was it not directed to a certain Smith, Farringdon Street, London?"

"Perhaps it was," carelessly replied Mr. Osborne, and internally he added, "fool that I was to trust my fate into the hands of a careless child! She has shown or lost the letter, and all is over." But he was too much master of himself, too well prepared for treachery, to betray any emotion; he merely said, with a slight touch of bitterness in his voice—

"I wonder, Monsieur Morel, you did not look for that missing letter in the grotto of the Witch on your way back?"

Monsieur Morel opened his eyes wide.

"And does Monsieur suppose I neglected so plain a duty? Of course I looked for it."

"But did not find it; of course not. Needless question."

"Monsieur is displeased with me," humbly said the foreman; "but let Monsieur remember what a night it has been and is still. Lightning so vivid, and thunder so loud, no one, I suppose, remembers. As for rain," he added, with a shrug, "it is not to boast of my willingness to serve Monsieur that I say it, but I am wet to the bone. But little would I care for that, if I had not had the misfortune ——"

"Let it be," impatiently interrupted Mr. Osborne; "I know what to think, Monsieur Morel."

He fixed on his foreman a look of grave sternness, which slightly disturbed the composure of Monsieur Morel.

"And what is more," resumed Mr. Osborne, but without allowing him to proceed, the foreman observed—

"I beg Monsieur's pardon, but there is a matter to which I think it right to call Monsieur's attention. On my return, a little while ago, to the grotto of the Witch, I found, not the lost letter, but this."

He drew, as he spoke, a small kid glove from the breast-pocket of his great-coat, and laid it on the table. Mr. Osborne looked at it fixedly. A presentiment of coming evil hung over him like a dark cloud, but he did not speak. Monsieur Morel took up the glove, and holding it up for his own survey and that of his master, he resumed, in a slow, cogitating voice—

"It is, as Monsieur sees, a very small woman's glove, for a small woman's hand. I found it, as I said, in the grotto of the Witch, on the very edge of that dark hole which I dare say Monsieur remembers; all the painters go and paint it, as if it were a beautiful thing, instead of being a black, ugly pit, without a bottom to it. Well, though that glove is sadly soiled with the wet earth, I could almost swear it is one of the pair I had the honour of bringing Mademoiselle Adèle de Courcelles two months ago from Saint Etienne, when I went there for Monsieur's business; but then," added Monsieur Morel, with an incredulous smile, "what should take Mademoiselle Adèle out on such a night as this?"

Mr. Osborne turned deadly pale. The truth flashed across him. Adèle had gone herself with his letter—what had happened to her? He looked at Morel—that sallow face told him nothing; he turned from it with a sickening dread of what might have happened, and rang nervously. Jean, who had come back that same day, soon appeared.

"Where is Mademoiselle Adèle?" asked Mr. Osborne, with unusual vehemence.

"Mademoiselle Adèle!" repeated Jean, hesitatingly. "Is it Mademoiselle Adèle, Monsieur said?"

"Where is she?—Quick—answer."

Jean looked bewildered.

"Monsieur must excuse me, but how can I tell precisely where Mademoiselle Adèle is just now?"

"Is she in the house?—That you know, I suppose?"

Jean stared at his master as if he thought that fever had affected his brain, but he controlled himself, and replied—

"Out of the house Mademoiselle Adèle cannot be at this hour; and in her room I will venture to say she is."

"Go and see at once, and bring me word."

Jean bent his head and withdrew slowly. Not a word was exchanged between the master and his foreman until the old man's return. At length his shuffling step was heard in the corridor. Slowly and leisurely, with the heavy tread of age, he came along, knocked at the door, opened and shut it carefully, and, standing before his master, calmly said—

"Mademoiselle Adèle is in her room."

"Thank God!" exclaimed Mr. Osborne, breathing like one relieved, "thank God!"

"Are you sure of it? have you seen her?" asked Morel, looking incredulous.

Jean thought the whole of this inquiry strange and impertinent; he was not, at all events, disposed to answer the questions of one whom he despised and disliked. He pretended deafness. But Mr. Osborne had heard Morel's question, and he anxiously echoed it.

"Ay, Jean, are you sure? have you seen Mademoiselle Adèle?"

"I have not seen Mademoiselle Adèle," replied Jean, sulkily, "but I have been to Mademoiselle de Courcelles's room door, and I have seen a light within."

"Did she speak to you?—did you hear her voice?" impatiently said Mr. Osborne.

"Mademoiselle did not speak to me, and I did not hear her voice," drily replied Jean. "I knocked at her door, but got no answer; Mademoiselle was, I dare say, saying her prayers."

"Why did you not look in through the keyhole?" asked Morel.

The old man reddened, and gave the foreman a look of silent indignation. Mr. Osborne rose, and half-angrily observed—

"I see there is but one way of knowing the truth." And having cast a rapid look on the table, to ascertain that he left nothing there unfit or unmeant for Morel's eye, he added, briefly and imperatively, in a tone that did not admit of argument or reply—"Jean, show me at once to the room of Mademoiselle Adèle."

Jean shook his head, but obeyed. Master and servant left together. Monsieur Morel remained behind. In a few minutes

Mr. Osborne had reached the young girl's room; but the light which Jean had seen was gone; the door, which he had found closed, was open; the room was vacant.

"I suppose Mademoiselle is below," said Jean, doubtfully.

"Go at once, and look," said Mr. Osborne, pacing the narrow room up and down with feverish impatience.

But Jean did not stir.

"Monsieur must excuse me," he said, in a moved voice; "but I cannot go."

"You cannot!" echoed Mr. Osborne, stopping short, and looking at him amazed; "why so?"

"I cannot go and leave Monsieur here alone in Mademoiselle de Courcelles's room," solemnly said Jean; "if Monsieur were to kill me for not doing it, I could not do it."

"Jean," emphatically said his master, "you are an old fool; lock the door; take the key; do what you like; but go at once."

But whilst he gave these orders, Mr. Osborne forgot that he was still in the room, and Jean was going to remind him of the fact, and further delay would have been the consequence, but for the sudden entrance of Jeannette.

"Mademoiselle!" she exclaimed uneasily, "where is Mademoiselle Adèle? Jean, did you see her? where is she?"

"When did you see her last?" hastily asked Mr. Osborne.

"This afternoon; but she must be somewhere!" she added, looking round; "I will never believe the story of that wretch Morel. A vile invention! The dear child never stirred without me before. Jean, run to the lumber-room; there were some old books and pictures there, she used to be fond of looking at. Go at once, I say!" she added, angrily, as Jean, amazed at what he heard, did not stir.

Mr. Osborne took the light from his hand, and went himself. He climbed up a ladder and a broken staircase, but neither books nor pictures had attracted Adèle there that day; the garret was empty. Accompanied by Jeannette, he searched over the whole Manor, but in vain. Adèle was not found.

At once Mr. Osborne's resolve was taken. He called Morel, gave him brief and imperative orders, and before five minutes were over, he rode out to search for Adèle, accompanied by the foreman and five men from the forge.

"I tell you," indignantly exclaimed Jeannette, "that it is of no use; Mamzelle Adèle gone out, indeed! She never did such a thing in all her life; very likely that she should begin on such a night as this! The wicked child has gone to some nook in

the garden, and is hiding there to drive poor old Jeannette out of her wits, and that is all."

She spoke in vain: the evidence of the glove, the tormenting suggestions of his own thoughts, were more convincing than her words to Mr. Osborne. Equally vain proved the interference of Mrs. Osborne. The rumour of the disappearance of Adèle reached her in her room where she sat writing. She hastily descended the staircase, and found her stepson in the act of riding out. She ventured in the damp, dark night after him, to remonstrate.

"Mr. dear William!" she said, feelingly, "you cannot be thinking of going out on this dreadful night?"

"The storm is over," he replied, shortly.

"But the air is keen, the chill is dangerous! And though I feel and understand your anxiety about this poor child, still remember, William, that your health and life are precious, very precious to us all."

One of the men who preceded the little band held a torch; its light shone on the pale, grave face of Mr. Osborne, and his stepmother could not but notice the bitter smile with which he heard her. But she persisted more feelingly than before.

"What will the doctor say to such imprudence? Why, it may bring on a relapse of that dangerous fever."

"Excuse me," he interrupted; "time is precious. I cannot linger longer."

He rode away. Mrs. Osborne stood on the stone threshold of the Manor, listening to the lessening sound of his horse's hoofs.

"Poor fellow! so soon caught!" she thought, with a scornful pity that avenged her of every past sarcasm.

The night was dark and starless; the wind was keen, but silent; the dull, heavy outline of the mountains rose on a gloomy sky; the road vanished like a pale line traced in dark space; the lake was a sombre spot, a pit silent and fathomless; and Jeannette sat on the stone steps of the Manor, moaning and waiting.

Two hours passed away. At length the tramp of horses was heard; the light of torches flashed on the rocks, dark figures of horses and their riders appeared, but they rode silently, like spectres in legends. Jeannette could not move; she sat there, stony any rigid, until the foremost horseman came up. It was Mr. Osborne; his pale face told all. Jeannette clapped her hands and uttered a loud cry. "Lost—lost!" she moaned. Silently he passed on; Mrs. Osborne, Isabella appeared. Jean groaning

aloud, met him on the threshold ; he crossed through them, without a word, on to his study. His stepmother had followed him ; she arrived in time to hear him lock and bolt the door. She stooped and looked through the keyhole. He stood with contracted brow and rigid lip, looking at the little glove of Adele on the table.

CHAPTER XIV.

ALICE.

MADAME LASCOURS sat in her luxurious boudoir ; the light of the lamp shone white on her handsome face ; a book lay on her lap, but she did not read ; her cheek rested on her hand, her eyes were fixed on vacant space ; she listened to the wind rushing past, and to the rain beating against the window panes, and she remembered an evening when sitting by the fireside in the Manor, she had listened with William Osborne to that stormy wind passing over the lake.

Monsieur Lascours, a white-haired man with expressive features and quick, brown eyes, sat opposite his wife ; he put down his newspaper with an anxious air.

"You are listening to that wind," he said, perceiving that her book had dropped on her lap ; "yes, it will ruin all our flowers."

"What a pity ! " abstractedly said Madame Lascours.

Her husband rose and walked to the window ; he raised the silk curtain and gazed on the gloom of a stormy night.

"I must go and see what can be done," he observed, impatiently ; "a few planks might save them. What do you think, Alice ?"

"I think, like you, that something might be done." She spoke with evident effort, and when her husband left the room, she sank back in her chair, and relapsed into her abstracted mood.

"Happy they," she thought, "who can forget the past, who are not for ever haunted by the thought of what is and what might have been. Happy they whose life is a blank, who have nothing to remember save days like other days."

Fiercer grew the night, and louder rose the wind. It blew from the lake, and brought Alice broken sounds of voices, amongst

which she distinguished the firm, commanding tones of her husband. Then came the noise of hammering, then a long pause followed. She rose and went to the threshold of the glass door that opened on the garden. The rain had ceased, the wind was still, and a faint star shone through a white cloud. The chill of the night felt pleasant and soothing. Madame Lascours went out, but she shunned the spot where the glare of torches would have led her to her husband and his men. She entered a solitary alley, that wound by the lake. It ended in a stone balcony that overlooked it. Below and around her all was gloom ; but through the dark shone a solitary light. It burned in the Manor of Courcelles.

"What brought me here ?" thought Alice, turning away, "what haunts me to-night ? What is going to happen, that I cannot find rest ?—that if the wind blows loud, I must think of her and of him ? He is the last of all men likely to attach himself to a child ; and if he did, or does, what is it now to me ?"

She turned back ; the storm rose again with renewed might ; a nameless fear seized her ; she sprang on like one pursued, but the wind fled as fast as she did, and rushed by her with a triumphant voice. She stopped short, ashamed of her foolish fear ; light shone through the trees ; a few steps more brought her to the side of M. Lascours.

"Alice, Alice—why did you come ?" he said, in a tone of reproach.

She did not reply. He drew her to his side, with concern. Her loosened hair was heavy with rain ; her face was white. She trembled, but did not speak.

"It is a dreary night," he said, "but I have saved some of our flowers."

Mechanically she turned to the spot to which he pointed.

"You have done well," she began ; then she broke off and said, in a lower tone, almost a whisper, "what is that ?"

Her raised hand pointed to the lake. A dark object was swiftly coming towards them on its heaving waves ; and before Monsieur Lascours could reply "it is a boat," the light of the torches had shone on the terrified face of the boatman and the bending figure of a woman. They were drifting fast towards the rocky bank ; in another moment their frail skiff dashed against it ; the man sprang on shore, and the dark waves swallowed the splitting boat.

Alice closed her eyes and turned her head away.

"Heaven be praised!" said the boatman, drawing a deep breath—"what a night!"

"And the woman!" exclaimed Monsieur Lascours, "where is the woman?"

"There never was such a night," said the boatman, unable, in the selfish instinct of self-preservation, to think of anything save the danger he had escaped.

Monsieur Lascours no longer heeded him: he had seized a lantern from the hand of a servant, and sprung down the stone steps that led to the lake; but in vain he looked around him; the foaming waves had kept no trace of their prey,

"There!" said his wife, who had followed him.

She pressed his arm, and with her other hand silently pointed to some pale object lying in the rocky bank. He took a step forward, stooped and looked. A white, inanimate girl lay within the shelter of the rocks against which the boat had split. The very force of the shock had thrown her there, beyond the reach of the waves.

"Is she dead, or living?" asked Alice, breathlessly. But before her husband could answer, she uttered a cry of distress and pain. "Adèle! Adèle!—it is Adèle!" she cried; and heedless of the waves that still lashed against the shore, she knelt down, and seizing the young girl in her arms, she attempted to raise her.

At once Monsieur Lascours put his wife aside. With the promptitude and energy of his character, he had raised Adèle, called his servants, given them rapid instructions, and carried the young girl to the house in less than five minutes. As he laid her down on a couch in his wife's boudoir, she sighed deeply, and opened her eyes.

Alice raised her up. It was plain that Adèle had only been stunned, with the shock of being cast ashore. The blood soon returned to her pale cheek, and life to her whole aspect; but she looked bewildered, and seemed unable to understand either where she was, or what had brought her there. Alice bent over her friend, and in a moved voice she said—

"You know me,—I am Alice. You are safe, quite safe."

Adèle looked at her fixedly, and said, slowly—

"The letter is gone."

Then suddenly she remembered the face of Alice, and uttering her name, she threw her arms around the neck of her friend. But scarcely had she given her one embrace, when a fuller and

clearer memory of all that had passed rushed to her. She started, and exclaimed, uneasily—

"Oh! Alice, I must go; they will be so uneasy. I must go at once, at once."

"Child! you are dreaming. You have but just escaped great danger. You cannot, you shall not go. Why, I cannot even send a message across the lake to let Jeannette know you are here."

"Poor Jeannette!" said Adèle, leaning her cheek on her hand, "poor Monsieur Osborne! I know what he will think. It will make him very unhappy, Alice."

She looked up with dim eyes in the face of her friend; but Madame Lascours did not reply. She said, in a tone of concern:

"You are wet, quite wet. Can you come up to my room? or shall Monsieur Lascours carry you?"

Adèle laughed at the question, and started up as if nothing had happened to her. She seemed to remember neither her danger nor her deliverance. She had been out on a stormy night, that was all. Death had passed near her, but invisible had been the spectre on which the eyes of youth so seldom gaze. She had, however, to submit to the kind and anxious control of her friend; and spite entreaties, and reluctance, and assurances that her clothes were barely wet, she had, too, to enter the large and luxurious bed of Madame Lascours's luxurious bed-room.

"I shall stay with you," said Madame Lascours, sitting down by her side; "and as soon as the night grows a little calm, a messenger shall cross the lake."

The assurance pacified Adèle, and with the lightness of her temper, and of her years, she looked around her—vivid carpets, the rarest of woods, costly laces—simplicity in the midst of splendour surrounded her on every side. Her exclamations of admiration and delight drew a sad sigh from her graver friend. What did she care about it all? But Adèle soon changed the theme.

"What a pity you do not come to Courcelles now," she said; "Monsieur Osborne is there now. Oh, how you would like and admire him!"

Madame Lascours did not reply.

"Do you like him so much?" she asked at length.

"I like him," said Adèle.

"But so very much?" persisted her friend.

"Alice, what do you mean? There are not two ways nor

two measures of liking. Monsieur Osborne is perfectly kind and handsome. Alice, I like him—more I cannot say.”

Madame Lascours bent her dark eyes on the young face beneath her. Fever and excitement gave the clear cheek of Adèle a vivid glow; her blue eyes shone like stars, her red lips smiled sweetly, her brown hair flowed around her like a veil that showed more than it concealed. She looked very lovely, full of youth, life, and beauty; the very being to charm away an unwary man's heart.

“He loves her, or he will love her,” thought Alice, rising as if she had been stung. “It is to be.”

“What is the matter?” asked Adèle, leaning up on one elbow and looking surprised. At once Alice came back, resumed her place, and taking the young girl's hand within her own, she patiently sat by her, listening to Monsieur Osborne's praises, until at length Adèle fell fast asleep.

She looked at her with a sad and dreamy gaze.

“What does all this mean?” she thought; “what brought her out on this dreadful night? What letter did she speak of? Why can she not utter ten words without bringing in his name?”

A low tap at the door roused her from these troubled thoughts; she softly stepped across the floor, opened the door, and saw the anxious face of her husband.

“Well,” he said.

“She is well, and fast asleep,” replied Alice.

“How does she feel? how does she look?”

Alice did not reply, but with a smile signed him to look in, and held up the light, so that it shone on the young girl's flushed and sleeping face.

Monsieur Lascours was a passionate admirer of handsome women, beautiful girls, lovely flowers, and all splendid things. He turned away, shook his head, and said emphatically—

“Alice, your little friend is a blooming rose. Has she any thorns?” he added, as his wife half closed the door, and followed him out.

“None, I verily believe,” replied Alice, with unusual warmth.

“Humph! what brought her out on this awful night? Well, no matter; 'tis her business, not ours. Have you thought of making the foolish little thing's clothes dry?”

For the husband of Alice was a thorough Frenchman, and never forgot the practical.

Madame Lascours replied with a smile, that she would see to everything, and returned to the bedside of the young girl. Adèle was still fast asleep. Alice bent over her, and softly kissed her. "Let it be," she thought, "let it be."

CHAPTER XV.

FRIENDSHIP.

ADÈLE was tired; she slept without dreaming or wakening until the sun shone full in her room. She awoke with a sense of joy she at first could not understand, but a moment's reflection soon told her. Mr. Osborne's letter was gone. "It is in Dijon now," she thought. "Who knows? in Paris perhaps."

Beyond this she would not go. Morel, his treachery, the lonely road, all she had dreaded and undergone, she banished from her mind: the letter was gone.

She rose, dressed herself quickly, and opened her window. All token of the past night's storm had fled. The vivid green of the mountains rose on the vivid blue of the sky; the gloom of their rocky base seemed to sink in the very depths of the still, dark lake, and before her rose, in the glow of the morning sun, the verdant gardens and the grey summits of the old Manor of Courcelles.

"So soon up!" said the voice of Alice.

Adèle turned round, behind her stood Madame Lascours, handsome, grave, richly dressed. She chid her gently for rising so early, then forestalled her inquiries, by informing her that with dawn a messenger had gone over to the Manor, and informed Jeannette of her safety. "And I believe," added Madame Lascours, "that your old friend herself will come for you this morning. But Monsieur Lascours is all anxiety to see you safe and well. Will you come down?"

They found Monsieur Lascours in the dining-room, all anxiety, as his wife had truly said, about Adèle. The kindness and the warmth of his inquiries touched and amused the young girl. She liked his stately mien, his keen brown eyes, and expressive features, even more than on the evening. "Alice is a happy wo-

man," she thought; "if he is so kind to me, a stranger, what must he be to her?"

After breakfast, Monsieur Lascours would show Adèle his garden. It had neither the extent nor the antique charm of that of Courcelles, but in its way it was beautiful; fine trees, alleys where shade and sunshine blended, verdant lawns, splendid flowers adorned it, and picturesque and varied views gave it an extent it did not owe to nature. Adèle admired and praised it enthusiastically.

"Then you prefer my garden to Courcelles?" promptly said Monsieur Lascours.

As promptly came the reply of Adèle:

"No. I like Courcelles better."

Her abrupt frankness seemed to please him, for he looked kindly at her; but he persisted:

"But my garden is much handsomer than that of Courcelles; you have not seen it yet. Come with me."

He preceded her with a vigorous and rapid pace, which soon made Alice pause with a smile.

"I cannot go so fast," she said; "can you?"

"Ay, and faster," replied Adèle; and lightly springing forward, she again stood by Monsieur Lascours.

"What have you got in Courcelles like this?" he asked, pausing at the entrance of a silent path that wound away through verdure and shade, and closed in a view of mountain and lake seen through azure mists.

"We have better," she resolutely replied; "we have the broad alley, two hundred feet long and thirty feet wide."

"Sunburnt—sunburnt—" he replied, quickly; "but nothing like this have you got," he added, opening the door of a hothouse, and showing her its splendid exotics.

Adèle looked around her and shook her head.

"Your flowers are fine," she said; "but I do not like them. They are shut up from light, life, and air. They are not flowers, but prisoners. Ours bloom in spring and fade in autumn, and are happy and free all the year round."

"Pooh! they bloom on every hedge, and grow in every garden—common, worthless things."

"Ah! bah," coolly replied Adèle. "The Almighty made them, and you cannot say more of yours."

"Are you a republican?" asked Monsieur Lascours, frowning with assumed severity.

Adèle shrugged her shoulders, and said she did not know, but that one flower was as good as another.

Monsieur Lascours was a passionate horticulturist ; he heard her with horror, and, with an abundance of botanical erudition, he clearly proved to her the aristocratic superiority of certain flowers over the rest.

Adèle heard him out, and said with a quiet smile :

" Very true ; but we have something in the garden of Courcelles, all your exotics could not purchase."

" What ? " he quickly asked.

" We have a lime-tree of a hundred and fifty years old, that blooms every first of May, and around that lime-tree an ivy plant that has grown and twined there, Jeannette says, for more than a hundred years."

Madame Lascours once more stood by their side. She heard the close of their discourse, and gave her husband an anxious look. His origin was obscure, and his flowers were his hobby ; the reply of Adèle might seem to him little better than an attack on these two sensitive points ; but that reply was uttered so simply, and the whole manner of Adèle was so free from pride of descent or voluntary impertinence, that Monsieur Lascours only smiled and confessed himself beaten.

" You are right, Mademoiselle Adèle," he said. " My garden is but a poor parvenu, and cannot compete with your majestic home."

" Then take me back to it," she said, coaxingly.

He said she was in a great hurry ; but her request was nevertheless complied with. In a few minutes Adèle had bidden Alice adieu, and a boat with two rowers was carrying her and Monsieur Lascours across the lake.

Alice looked after them and sighed. Where they were going she could not go ; the presence they were seeking was to her forbidden ; an eternal barrier rose between her and past days, when she, too, was young, and, though never so gay as Adèle, light-hearted and free.

" But never like her," she thought, as the young girl's clear laugh came to her across the still lake ; " never like her. She met death yesterday, and this morning she can laugh. She has known my husband but a day, and she is bolder with him than I after seven years. Ah ! some are made to be blest, to seize and enjoy the golden time ; and others are made to look on, to know what they should do to be happy, and never do it. The will of God be done."

Rapidly they rowed across the calm lake. Adèle was joyous as a bird, and Monsieur Lascours listened and smiled. Strangely enough, his thoughts took the same turn the thoughts of his wife had taken.

"I am more than three times the little thing's age," he thought; "yet had I married her, I could have made her a happy woman. Allice, I never could. Sad she was on her wedding-day, and sad she will be until I die."

These bitter thoughts sent an involuntary cloud on his brow, and he heard, without heeding, the talk of Adèle, until she suddenly exclaimed:

"There is Monsieur Osborne in his boat. Oh! how wrong of him."

Monsieur Lascours looked, and did indeed see Mr. Osborne's boat, not rowed by him, however, coming towards them. The old man turned to the young girl.

"Mademoiselle Adèle," he said, in a low, clear voice, bending the while his keen look on her upraised face, "you are young, very young, and the world is not always kind to the young. You may need a friend to give you aid, to interfere in your behalf; if ever you do need such a friend, apply to me."

Surprise kept Adèle mute. "A friend," she thought, "what should I want a friend for?" And she shook her gay head at life and its trials. But Monsieur Lascours seemed to expect no reply; his boat now stood alongside with Mr. Osborne's; they had exchanged a formal greeting.

"I am much better, thank you," languidly said Mr. Osborne, in reply to Monsieur Lascours's inquiry.

"Ah! but how ill he still looks," put in Adèle, giving him a compassionate glance, which he returned smiling.

No more was said; the two boats rowed on until they reached the stone-steps. Adèle lightly sprang out, but Monsieur Lascours did not follow her.

"Good-bye, Mademoiselle Adèle," he said, kindly, "remember my words."

And with a bow to Mr. Osborne, who stood on the lowest step, he sank back in the boat that shot away across the lake. The sunburnt boatman who had rowed Mr. Osborne's boat was tucking up his striped trowsers to enter the water and fasten the boat to the iron ring that held it, Adèle gave him a rapid look, and bending, she whispered to Mr. Osborne:

"It is gone."

She said no more, but darted up the steps into the alley.

He followed her more slowly. When he stood by her side, Adèle again gave a quick, anxious look around her. The spot was secluded, though open; none could approach unseen and listen, yet her voice sank as she said:

"Oh! I have so many things to tell you. The letter is gone, you know. Do not trust Morel; he is a traitor."

"I know it."

"But do not keep him,—not an hour."

He smiled at her earnestness.

"I want him," he said.

"But he is a traitor," she urged.

"It is not the known enemy who is dangerous," he replied.

"Hear me, and then say that if you like," she persisted.

As to hear her was precisely what Mr. Osborne most wished, he yielded and looked down at her like one prepared to listen. We know her tale, and need not repeat it. He interrupted her but once.

"What did you feel when you were in those willows?" he asked.

"I thought that if he saw me he would kill me," she replied.

Mr. Osborne took her hand and pressed it.

"He dare not, even in thought, he dare not harm you. But God forgive me! Go on."

She told him how she had sent the letter. "The rest," she added, simply, "I do not remember well. I got back in the boat. When we reached the middle of the lake there rose a storm that sent us drifting. I remember the dark sky, the white curling waves, the rush of angry waters; then a long blank follows, and the kind, handsome face of Alice, bending over me closes all."

Mr. Osborne dropped her hand.

"Mademoiselle Adèle," he said, "you are a fearless little creature. Truly, you do not belie your old heroic blood."

That blood rushed up, red and burning, to her cheek. He pursued:

"The service you have rendered me I never can repay,—that letter may save me from ruin; it will, at least, prolong a hard battle, and give another chance to victory; it will defeat the treacherous, and teach them that I may be betrayed, but scarcely deceived. To accomplish this, to do me this good work, you have risked your life. Do me the justice to believe I did not contemplate, when I placed the letter in the kind little

hand that left its glove in the cave of the Witch, that the shadow of peril could come near you."

"Why do you speak of all this?" she said, smiling; "it is over,—do not think of it."

"Not think of what I never shall forget!" he said gravely; "excuse me, I must think of it."

"Well, then, do not talk about it; rather let me tell you a thing I have to say, though I do not know how to say it."

Her dark blue eyes were raised up to his with something between daring and shyness, her red lips quivered with a light, hesitating smile; doubt, desire, eagerness, gave to her whole aspect a grace and a charm, which Mr. Osborne felt so keenly, that he could not help prolonging it there by a longer silence than was needed. At length he said—

"Pray speak."

"If you would let me write letters for you, I would be true, and —, I knew you would laugh at me!" she cried, reddening as she caught the smile he tried to repress. In vain he protested that he was not laughing at her. Adèle persisted: "He thought her foolish, she knew he did."

"On my word, I do not; far from it, Mademoiselle Adèle; the time may even come when I shall remind you of your offer."

"Yes, but you do not accept it now," she said, in a nettled tone; "and yet I could be more useful to you than you think. There are fifty-three stone vases in this alley, and in each vase there grows a rose-tree. Say that there are nine roses, and seven buds on each; how many roses and how many buds for the fifty-three vases?"

Mr. Osborne, surprised, hesitated a little; but Adèle merely laid her finger on her lips and stood still awhile, then she looked up, and said,—

"Four hundred and seventy-seven roses, and three hundred and seventy-one rose-buds."

He looked amazed. She laughed triumphantly.

"That is an easy one. I can answer more difficult questions. Only try me."

"On my word, I shall, some day. But in the meanwhile, I, too, have something to say, for which I must entreat your patient hearing. I liked you the first moment I saw you, Mademoiselle Adèle. I think you, too, like me. Let us be friends—true friends, I mean—friends in liking, confidence, and trust."

"Oh, no! that can never be!" said Adèle, looking saga-

cious,—“it is good; it is like you to say it; but it can never be.”

“Why not?” he asked, surprised.

“Because we should be equal to be what you say; and you know very well that you are worth ten like me.”

Free, undisguised, was the admiration of the imprudent girl; but though it was warm, it was not tender, and did not disturb or alarm its object.

“Indeed,” he said, “I am not going to grant that. There is not one man, Mademoiselle Adèle,” he added, lightly touching her cheek, “who could stand before Almighty God by the side of a good and innocent little girl like you.”

“Oh! you will make me feel hot again,” said Adèle, turning very red; “I am not used to it, and I do not like it.”

“I have taken the liberty of praising you for the first and last time,” he said; “yet allow me a few more words. I overheard Monsieur Lascours’s offer. I trust that before you apply to him in any necessity, you will remember me.”

“Oh! yes!” she cried, very willingly; “I know you long-er, and I like you better.”

The warning of his stepmother rushed back to his mind; but the fearless innocence of the young face on which he gazed, sent it back like a dark spirit into the depths of its native night. Suddenly he started, though slightly. He had heard a heavy tread.

“Monsieur Morel is coming,” he said.

“I will not look at the traitor,” she cried, “I will not.”

She ran off angry and indignant, whilst Mr. Osborne calmly awaited the approach of his treacherous foreman.

Even as she ran, Adèle wondered within herself at Mr. Osborne. How could he wish to be friends with her? M. Lascours she would not have minded; but Mr. Osborne she wished to worship, and adore, and admire “like a star.”

CHAPTER XVI.

JEANNETTE’S YOUNG MASTER.

“WILL that perverse child never come?” indignantly exclaimed Jeannette.

She had not time to say more; a pair of young arms was twined around her neck, warm and ardent lips were pressed on her cheek, and a laughing face looked up into hers.

Jeannette laughed, then cried, then scolded, and finally holding out her young mistress at arm's length, she began a series of questions. "What had taken her out?—What had kept her out?—Why had she never said to Jeannette that she was going out?"

Adèle had found her old friend in the bare stone room where she usually sat; the window was open; the joyous morning sun came in; it fell on Jeannette's wheel standing idle in a corner.

"Jeannette," solemnly said Adèle, "you might as well ask that wheel there to answer you, as to ask me. I cannot—I will not."

Jeannette's arms dropped by her side, her lips parted with amazement, then closed again. Adèle had looked so resolutely and so proudly in her face, that Jeannette felt silenced.

"Does Mademoiselle want anything from me?" she asked, in a subdued voice.

"Nothing Jeannette, thank you," replied Adèle, again speaking lightly, "save the news of all that happened whilst I was away."

"Nothing happened," shortly, said Jeannette; "Mademoiselle was missing, and Monsieur Morel picked up her glove, and Monsieur Osborne went out with five men to look for her."

"He went out to look for me!" cried Adèle, with a start; "ah, he did not tell me that. How wrong, how very wrong of him, ill as he still looks; and how kind," she added, in a low, moved tone.

"She has already seen him," thought Jeannette, and internally she commented on the fact. Aloud she merely observed—

"Louise went this morning; Monsieur Jean pretends to be very glad of it; but he is very much mistaken if he thinks I care a pin. Madame Osborne and her daughters are going away this evening, I believe; a good riddance of the lot, say I."

"Where are they going?" asked Adèle.

"I do not trouble myself with the concerns of other people," shortly, said Jeannette; "no one has told me, and I have asked no one."

"But Monsieur Osborne is not going, is he?" cried Adèle, struck with the possibility of the fact.

"I cannot say; but I should not think it unlikely."

"No, no, Jeannette, he is not going,—he is too ill still. Besides, he would have told me."

"Why so?" sharply said Jeannette; "Mademoiselle does not tell me, her old, faithful servant, when she means to take a

walk. Why should Monsieur Osborne tell Mademoiselle, whom he only knows a few weeks, when he means to take a journey?"

Adèle reddened, and looked very much provoked.

"Good bye to you, Jeannette," she said, darting towards the door; "you are too cross this morning."

"No, no, Mademoiselle, do not go," said Jeannette, with tears in her eyes, "and do not be angry with me."

"But why cannot I mention Monsieur Osborne's name without your saying something unpleasant?" asked Adèle, still by the door, and pouting a little.

Jeannette looked very earnestly at her pretty little mistress.

"I have been forty years and more in the family," she said, with a sigh. "I think I have won the right of plain speech; and once for all, whether it please Mademoiselle or not, I will speak plainly. It has been on my mind since the first day, and it must come out. For the sake of all my faithful services, I ask but one thing of Mademoiselle—to listen to an old story."

Adèle detested Jeannette's old stories; but her naturally kind heart and gentle temper prevailed. A little impatiently she shook her head; but she subdued the feeling, left the door, took a stool, and sat down at Jeannette's feet, prepared to listen.

"I never told it to any one," said Jeannette, folding her hands on her knees, "I never thought to tell it; there's many an old tale like this that goes down to the grave locked in an old heart like mine, and which the sneering world knows nothing about. When the cheek is blooming and the hair is black, all right and good; but when the brow is wrinkled and the head is white, it is like raking up ashes after a fire is dead and cold."

Adèle looked up surprised. She had expected to hear, "When Louis the Cruel was Lord of Courcelles," with a prolix and horrifying account of the family crimes in which Jeannette took so much pride; but different was Jeannette's prelude, and different was Jeannette's tale.

"I was twenty," said Jeannette, "when I went out to service in Normandy. To a fine old château I went, to wait on my lady, a widow, who was always ill and languid. There was my young master, too, the Count, just turned sixteen, as tall as Monsieur Osborne, and twice as handsome, but I had nothing to do with him. My lady was fond of me, and kept me about her. She worked, my young master read aloud, and I stood behind her chair and listened. I did not understand half of what he read, and my legs were sadly tired with the standing, but never in my life was I so happy as I was then, standing behind the chair of Madame."

"You were very fond of her," said Adèle.

Jeannette sighed and shook her head.

"Yes, yes," she said, "for she was kind, and so was my young master. If he met me in the orchard—and somehow or other we often met there—he would pluck the finest fruit, and give it to me with his own hand. If he went to the fair, he brought me back the finest ribbons money could get. If he came down to the broad place where the elms grew, to dance there with the village girls,—I tell no untruth when I say that he danced twice as often with me as with any other. He had a way, too, of smiling in my face with his handsome blue eyes, and of calling me 'Petite Jeannette,' that went to my very heart. To serve him I would have gone through fire: I would have laid down and made a footstool of myself, if it could have pleased my young master."

"And were you fonder of him than of your mistress?" said Adèle.

Jeannette looked in her eyes, and smiled.

"A little," she replied; "but it was no wonder. He was so kind. I did not know how to read; nothing would do but he should teach me. I hated learning; but what would I not have done to please my dear young master? Little he guessed, when he called me a clever girl in the morning, that I had sat up half the night studying alone. Unluckily for me, he was called away to his regiment—he was Colonel in the Queen's Musqueteers—before I knew how to read; so that I have remained where he left me,—that is to say, I can spell, long words excepted.

"Madame had long been ailing, and at length she died. Her son was with her. Night and day had he ridden to see her again, and receive her blessing. He came back from the funeral pale as death, and entering the room where I was crying alone, a room just like this; he threw his arm around my waist, laid his head on my shoulder, and said—

"'You loved her, Jeannette,' and he cried like a child as he was, for seventeen he had not yet seen. Well, I loved him like my life, and the sight of his grief made me half mad. I forget what I said, but how can I ever forget what I did? I took his head in both my hands, and I kissed him again and again. I was not a servant then; he was not the Count, my young master, but I was a woman; I loved him, and he was in trouble; he grew red, and I remembered all. I threw myself at his feet. I said I would go that day. I asked him to forgive me.

"'Forgive you, Jeannette, for being fond of me!' said my

young master; what shall I do to my enemies?' He raised me, kissed me of his own accord, and did not leave me until I had promised never to forsake him. 'My mother died in your faithful arms, Jeannette,' he said, 'and I want to die there too.' Alas! alas! I little thought that as he said, so it would be.

"Well, time passed. My young master got over his grief, and came and went. He took little notice of me; but now and then, when he met me in the hall or on the staircase, his blue eyes would look at me in the old way, and in his pleasant voice, he would say, 'Petite Jeannette.' More he could not well do, without bringing scandal and suspicion on me; for he was a man, and I was still young; and—I may speak of those things now—I had been a pretty girl, and I was reckoned a prettier woman.

"Well, whether he was there or not, I was everything in the château, and eight years had I been in it in all, when, on a fine summer morning, I met my young master riding out. He was twenty-four then, the handsomest of men. He wore a blue coat laced with gold, and white satin waistcoat, a lace cravat, and a black cocked hat, with just a sprinkling of powder on his yellow hair; and he rode a milk-white horse, whose eyes shone like fire, and whose coat was bright as satin. I looked at my young master, dazzled as if I had seen him for the first time; so gallant was his mien, so sweet and noble his handsome face. 'Petite Jeannette,' he said, 'wish me good luck.' His voice was so soft, his look was so kind, that my very heart was stirred; and almost without knowing what I said, I answered—'May Monsieur le Comte ever succeed in his wishes!' I saw him again that day; he had just returned, and he was coming up the staircase as I went down. He did a thing he had never done since the day of his mother's funeral; he threw his arms around my neck, and kissing me on both cheeks, he said, 'Wish me joy, Jeannette; in a week you shall have a new mistress.' Ah, well, Mademoiselle may laugh at me, and think I was but a fool, but if his arms had not been about me, I should have fallen. But it did not last; I had known all along that it would come to that; so I curtsied to my master, and I smiled bravely in his face, and said—'I wish Monsieur le Comte joy.' And I went away, and told all the servants how happy I was to have a new mistress, until I could get to my own room; and there—there I cried as if my heart would break."

"Poor Jeannette!" softly said Adèle.

"Yes, Mamzelle; poor Jeannette! and yet how many would tell you: 'she may thank herself for it all?' But you see I had

not meant to be so fond of him ; one never means those things, they come unawares ; and then he was so kind, that the mischief was done before I well knew how. Why had I eyes to see that he was handsome ? or, rather, why had I a heart to feel that he was kind ? Well, well, no matter ; everything was as it should be. I felt it, I said it, and I bore it, but it was hard. Well, the day of the wedding came, and I had to see to everything, of course."

" You ! " exclaimed Adèle.

" And does Mademoiselle think I could have let any one else prepare a thing for my young master's wedding-day ? " asked Jeannette, with some pride. " No, no, I loved him dearly, oh, very dearly ! but he was still my master, and I was Jeannette, his faithful servant-woman. I gathered flowers for the dinner-table. I put the velvet cushion in the chapel where the bride was to kneel on the morning after her wedding ; and I smoothed, with my own hands, the pillow trimmed with lace on which her head was to rest beneath my master's roof ; and as I did it, I prayed—and I prayed all the better for the fulness of my poor heart—I prayed that my master's wife might ever be blest and beloved—Beloved !—ah, when I saw her, I felt that beloved she must ever be. She was little, very little, spite her red, high heels, and barely fifteen, but so beautiful, so white, so fair, though her hair and her eyes were black, that she looked like a fairy. I overheard some one saying that in all France there was not another like her ; and I believed it, and wished it so. Who had so good a right as my young master to the most beautiful wife ? And I will tell Mademoiselle an odd thing—I was very wretched on the wedding-day of my young master, and yet I was very happy ; for as it was I who had provided and arranged everything ; so every time his young wife looked pleased, he smiled at me if I was there ; and I was glad and miserable in a breath. Well, well, it seems but folly to be raking up such old things. I got over my grief with time. The young Countess, though a little impatient—she had been a spoiled child—was kind to me, and I learned to love her dearly, but never as I had loved my young master."

She paused. Adèle had heard her with eager interest, and eagerly she asked—

" Who was he, Jeannette ? What was his name ? "

A sad smile stole over the old woman's face.

" Mademoiselle would laugh, if I were to tell her," she said.

" Laugh ! No, indeed, Jeannette. Do tell me."

"Mademoiselle's mother was from Normandy," said Jeannette. "I wonder if Mademoiselle can guess whose daughter her mother was, and why old Jeannette thinks there is not such another pair of blue eyes as those of Mademoiselle Adèle."

The blue eyes of Mademoiselle Adèle opened wide.

"My grandfather!" she exclaimed; "it was my grandfather, Jeannette."

"Alas, yes," sighed Jeannette. "My young master was the grandfather of Mademoiselle, whom I received in my arms at her birth, as I had received her mother before her. I dare say Mademoiselle thinks it very strange that a poor girl like me should have ventured to think of a great gentleman."

"No, no, Jeannette; but my old grandfather!"

"Old! he was not old. I am old and withered, and a generation and more has come and passed away since the things I speak of happened; but age never withered him. He was not thirty when he died, and he was as handsome as when, standing behind his mother's chair, I wondered in my foolish heart if the world held another like him. He died too, as he had wished to die, in my arms; for, alas! his poor little wife was giving birth in the next room to a child which its father never saw and never blessed."

"Oh! Jeannette, what a strange, sad story!" said Adèle, clasping her hands around her knees and looking up wistfully in the old woman's face.

"I wonder what Mademoiselle would say if she knew the whole of it!" exclaimed Jeannette, with a sigh.

"Why, what else is there?" asked Adèle, surprised.

"I never thought to tell *that* to any one; but I have told you the rest—as well may I tell that too. And, perhaps, Mademoiselle, that will teach and show you more than all I have yet said:—It was the day before my young master died; I was alone with him and handing him a drink. As he took it from my hand he looked me full in the face, and said: 'You have been very fond of me, Jeannette.' 'I have always been Monsieur le Comte's faithful servant,' I replied. 'I say that you have been very fond of me,' he said again, 'and you know what I mean.' I did know it well enough, and though I was a girl no longer, though that foolish time was over, I was still a woman, and my poor face felt all on fire. My young master said again: 'Do not think I did not see it—do not think I did not care for it; the truth is, Jeannette,' he said, speaking quite warmly, 'that I was much too fond of you myself to wish to bring you to shame.' A word

I could not answer; my legs shook under me. After all, he had liked me. Oh! never—never as I had loved him! but still he had liked me—as a young man likes a pretty girl, with rosy cheeks and black eyes; but still he had liked me. My young master sighed, and said again:—‘Jeannette, I am dying, and the dark days are coming’—the revolution was brooding—‘and I must leave a poor little wife and child to God alone knows what fate. Jeannette, never forsake them—though the whole world should abandon them, be true to them as you have been true to me. The people will rise against their masters and take sore vengeance for the past; the servant will betray the hand that gave it bread; but you, Jeannette, oh! you will never forget that you have been dear to your master’s heart, and sacred as any lady to your master’s honour.’ He sank back quite tired. I knelt down by his bed, and I kissed the hand of the noble gentleman who had scorned to tempt to sin a fond and foolish girl, a poor peasant’s daughter. I vowed, that as I had loved him, I would love his wife, his child, and the children of his child, if I lived to see them. And have I not kept that vow?” cried Jeannette, breaking into passionate sobs and tears. “His little wife had been the darling of his heart—did she not become the darling of mine? When she lost home and fortune in the Terror, did I not work for her and her baby? Let her tell him in the next world, where she so soon followed him, let her tell him if, whilst she lived, Jeannette ever suffered toil and labour to stain the little white hand he had been so fond of kissing.”

Jeannette ceased; a long pause followed; when the old woman spoke again it was in a wholly altered tone.

“Does Mademoiselle know,” she said sadly and gravely, “why I have told her so old a story?”

CHAPTER XVII.

LOVE.

ADÈLE looked up like one wakening from a dream, and said quietly:

“No, Jeannette. I do not know—why was it?”

The natural question seemed to embarrass Jeannette considerably; nevertheless she said:

"Mademoiselle may see that what undid me was my master's kindness. Had he not been so kind he might have been the handsomest of handsome gentlemen, and I would not have cared for him—not otherwise at least than as my master."

"Of course not," replied Adèle.

"But kindness—does Mademoiselle know what kindness can do? It melts a heart, as the spring sun thaws snow; it makes the strong one weak as a little child."

Adèle smiled at something in her own thoughts, and said, softly:

"Yes, Jeannette, kindness is sweet and warm as the warm sun."

"And the sun is good for age and dangerous to youth," said Jeannette, looking troubled. "Oh! it will not do for girls to whom gentlemen are kind, to think too much about that kindness. Who would not like to look at a girl of sixteen, with rosy cheeks, blue eyes, dark hair, and a face as bright as that of the morning? But to look is not to love! Who would not be kind to a little thing that never harmed a fly, that runs about like a kid, that plays like a kitten and sings like a bird, and laughs so sweetly, that one can never tell which is most pleasant to listen to; her laugh or her song! But, oh! that kindness of a gentleman to a child is not the love of a man for a woman."

The red lips of Adèle parted; her blue eyes opened with amazement.

"And then," sadly pursued Jeannette, without looking at her, "the liking of some men—ay, and of the best—is often a strange thing. For your all they will give back a little, and stop there. Love you they cannot; that time is not yet come for them, or it is gone by. Marry you they will not, you are too young or too poor; but a little through vanity—God help us, we are all weak!—a little through blindness, a little because they do not know the mischief they are doing, they let you love, and when they marry some one else, or go off with themselves, and never return, they are very sorry for you. But why were you so foolish or so fond?"

Adèle started to her feet, red like a crimson flower. "Hush, Jeannette," she cried, "hush! no more!"

And springing through the door, she vanished.

"Too late!" groaned Jeannette; "I should have spoken before—too late!"

Light as a bird, Adèle ran down an alley; she paused breathless on reaching her usual place of refuge, the statue of Silence in

the mase; she sat down on the stone step, and burying her burning face in her hands, she questioned her beating heart. "Am I in love with Monsieur Osborne?" she asked, trembling.

"Of course you are," was the pitiless reply; "you are so fond of him that you can think of nothing and no one else; that Jeannette sees it, that *he* sees it, and laughs at you." "No, no, I am sure he does not," she answered, indignantly; "and really," she added, looking up half-angrily, "I do not think I am in love with him, after all. I am sure I am not. I feel, I know I should not like to marry him—oh, no, not at all!" she thought, reddening, and feeling uneasy at the thought, though alone; "but I should like him to marry some one else; I should be glad to see him look happier than he does sometimes. Ah, if Alice were only single—not a widow—I cannot wish poor Monsieur Lascours to die—how I should like him to know, love, and marry her. How happy I should feel to live here with them both."

And for a moment she saw a strange vision, keen, distinct as a thing she had seen or was to see. They stood in the Hall of the Manor, Mr. Osborne and Alice; her eyes were raised to his, as his were bent to hers; children grew around them; Adèle saw

"Their unborn faces shine
Beside the never-lighted fire."

And, starting at the vividness of her dreams, she beheld, not Alice, nor Mr. Osborne, but Mrs. Osborne, who stood looking at her with an expression of mingled pleasure and tenderness on her fair face.

"My dear, dear child!" she said, extending her white hand, and speaking in her kindest voice,—*"how happy I feel to see you once more safe. Oh, the anxiety, the terror of last night were dreadful—dreadful to us all."*

Mechanically, Adèle had risen, and laid her hand in that of the lady; but on hearing this remark, she half withdrew it, and looked mistrustful. She expected open questions or a covert interrogatory; for what other purpose could Mrs. Osborne be seeking her now? But Adèle was mistaken; guiltless of such intentions was the cautious lady. Why put imprudent questions when she all but knew? She pursued—

"My dear son William was like a madman. In vain I entreated him to remember his recent illness. He could not heed advice, remonstrances, or entreaties; but indeed we were all distracted."

Adèle looked troubled.

"I was very sorry indeed," she said, "very sorry to learn that Monsieur Osborne had gone out to look for me. It never occurred to me that he would do such a thing."

"Because you do not know him," said Mrs. Osborne, with a sad smile; "knowing him, you would wonder at nothing. He is the best, the most generous, the noblest of men," she added, in a low, measured voice. "What I and my dear children would do without him now," she added, raising her handkerchief to her eyes, "Heaven alone knows."

Youth is credulous and true. Adèle was touched. Madame Osborne was a good lady, and very fond of her stepson. She drew a step nearer to her, and looked in her face with a friendly look. The handkerchief was withdrawn; the pale blue eyes were fixed on hers; the thin and delicate though handsome mouth smiled sweetly.

"You are a dear little thing!" she said; and she really thought and meant it. She never had had a particle of feminine jealousy in her life; and handsome herself, she had always liked the beauty of other women.

"And a good little thing," she added, after a pause; "I am sure I can trust in you, that I can speak openly, that you will keep my secret."

The word secret startled Adèle.

"No, no, pray tell me nothing!" she exclaimed, "I detest secrets."

Mrs. Osborne smiled, amused.

"My dear child, this is scarcely a secret," she said; "all I wish you is not to tell my son William."

"No, no," interrupted Adèle, "I will not hear it; tell me nothing I am not to tell him."

"Well, then, tell him if you please!" persisted Mrs. Osborne, "I hope you will not; indeed, I feel sure you will not; he would not thank me for my interference; and the sad breach, already too deep, would be widened; but I lay no restriction on you—none; you may speak or not, at your pleasure. All I ask of you is to hear me."

Adèle looked perturbed, and said she would rather hear nothing. But Mrs. Osborne was resolute.

"My dear child, you must," she said, assuming the gentle authority of her years; "you are not more reluctant to hear than I to speak; but I leave to-night,—I cannot choose—speak I must, and plainly, too."

Adèle submitted.

"I will be brief," said Mrs. Osborne; "indeed, I have little to say. You know William, but you cannot know, as I do, all his virtues, and, alas! his faults, too. He is good, generous, proud, sensitive, honourable to folly; easily offended, not easily reconciled; a little ironical, a little sarcastic, but kind; above all, ever and under every circumstance, honourable."

The portrait, though rapidly sketched, was like, and it struck and interested Adèle by its likeness. This Mrs. Osborne saw, and she pursued—

"Such he is to those that know him thoroughly. For the world he acts the part of a peculiar and handsome man, fitful and restless, who travels and sketches, and casts away to idleness high qualities and rare gifts. And that is true too," added Mrs. Osborne; "but there is something else which the world cannot guess, which his dearest friends do not suspect, which he himself knows not, which I alone have fathomed. William has been disappointed in love, and unhappy in marriage, but his heart is ardent, his feelings are deep; his sense of the beautiful is painfully keen; none, save a lovely woman, can he love;" and her he will love with idolatrous affection, Mrs. Osborne would have added, but Adèle did not give her time.

"No, no, I will not hear any more," she cried, stopping her ears, "Monsieur Osborne would not like me to know about his feelings, light or deep, and I do not want to know what he can wish none, save God Almighty, to know," she added, withdrawing her fingers from her ears, and looking a little haughtily in Mrs. Osborne's face. A red spot rose to the lady's brow, but she laughed lightly.

"You are a loyal little creature," she said, gaily; "well, I will not say what I meant to say; I will but add an entreaty which your true, kind heart will not refuse to gratify—I went last night to your room for that purpose. By the way, my dear, why do you not have a better room than that little cupboard?"

"I like my room," shortly, said Adèle; "besides, I am nothing in this house—Monsieur Osborne is master."

Mrs. Osborne laid her hand on the young girl's shoulder, smiled in her face, and opened her lips to say something which—like one who thinks better of it—she did not say.

"True, true," she assented, gravely; "well, I will be brief. An unhappy division has sprung between my son Robert and my dear son William." She paused, but Adèle made no remark. Mrs. Osborne sighed and resumed. "All the blame lies on my poor boy's side. I have advised him to throw himself on his

elder brother's mercy; I have got no answer; I am going to England at once to try the effect of my presence; but, alas! it may happen that Robert will have already left. I cannot think, without terror, of a meeting between him and William there in my absence."

"Ah, but Monsieur Osborne is so good," exclaimed Adèle.

"He is; but he has been injured in the most sensitive points—his confidence, which has been betrayed; his honour, which has been perilled. Oh, my child! my dear child!" she added, seizing the two hands of Adèle, and speaking with sudden fervour, "promise me that if my poor boy comes in his mother's absence, you will be his good angel; that your prayers——"

"Oh, Madame!" cried Adèle, alarmed at the turn her remarks were taking, "how could I interfere? Monsieur Osborne would be too kind to laugh at me,—but——"

"Laugh at *you*!" interrupted Mrs. Osborne, "at *you*, whom he holds so dear!"

"He does not—he does not," said Adèle, red and indignant; "it would be shameful folly; and he is good, and wise as he is good."

"You underrate your own merits," said Mrs. Osborne, ironically.

Adèle looked her in the face, and tapped her foot indignantly.

"I think the whole world is going mad about love," she said, with an amazement that had something comic. "Jeannette thinks I like him too much, and you think him, the word will out, in love with me! One is just as true as is the other," she added, very scornfully. "What!" she continued with angry tears, "I cannot like and admire a good and admirable gentleman, but I am thought immodest? what! he cannot show kindness to a friendless girl, but he is thought foolish? Ah! Madame, what do you know of him after all?" She did not wait for the reply, but walked out of the maze.

"Mademoiselle de Courcelles is blunt," thought Mrs. Osborne, not much pleased with the brusquerie of the young girl, nor yet with that intuitive sense of truth which so promptly defeated her.

Adèle walked back to Jeannette's room. The old woman gave her a doubtful look, half-beseeching forgiveness. The bright blue eyes that so often reminded her of her young master, looked kindly on Jeannette; with a touch of childish dignity the young girl said:

"I am not angry, Jeannette; but you must learn to know me better. I like him, but not as the princesses like the princes in fairy tales; not at all. I could look in his face any day as I look into yours now, Jeannette."

Jeannette looked at her little mistress; the face of Adèle was calm and smiling, and the clearness of the brow, the serenity of the look told of maiden peace undisturbed, and told it in language too convincing not to be believed. Jeannette breathed relieved.

"But, Mademoiselle," she observed, hesitatingly, "you must still be careful; if the gentleman should think——"

Adèle turned on her with sparkling eyes.

"Never say that again," she cried, angrily; "never—never."

That same day, Mrs. Osborne, her daughters and her servants, left the Manor of Courcelles.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ALCESTIS.

Who is it that thinks a country life dull? Who can dread the stillness and the stagnation of its solitude? Vain thought, and vainer dread. Life does not make us; we make life. What we have to spend, must we not spend, be the object what and where it will? A country life is full of events, for a magician's wand changes the most trifling incident into a thing of delight or into a portentous disaster. It is pregnant with emotions rapid and stormy, for in its peaceful air passion broods like a thunder-cloud, and in its stillness and solitude the heart listens to strange voices lost in the tumult of the city. Treacherous, therefore, like sleeping waters, is the repose that seems so sweet to the unwary; perfidious the puerile pleasure which they take in childish things. But such serious considerations did not alarm Mr. Osborne. Perhaps, because he felt secure, perhaps because there is a spirit of opposition from which the best are not exempt, he seemed determined to justify the forewarnings of Mrs. Osborne and the suspicions of Jeannette.

The autumn was beautiful and still; the sun was warm, the loud winds were at rest; white mists floated over the mountains

in the morning, but they melted away in the noonday glow, and bright and burning looked in the setting sun the withering oaks that climbed the mountain side; at night the moon shone full and clear above the lake.

Mrs. Osborne and her daughters stayed away; they were in Paris, and so were the De Launays; Mademoiselle de Janson seemed to have gone away with the departing world; the master of the house and the little girl, whose inheritance he possessed, alone remained in Courcelles, and spite of warnings, spite perhaps of prudence, they were seldom apart.

The Manor was large, and its old garden was larger; why, then, should one spot of Manor or garden ever hold these two? Yet thus it was. Where she was he soon appeared, and from where he was Adèle did not long remain absent. True, they were never alone, for Jeannette lurked around them like an uneasy spirit; but why should a handsome and agreeable man of thirty, and a pretty, half wild girl of sixteen, be so much together?

Yet there seemed no real cause for uneasiness. She was pretty, and he liked beauty; she was merry, and she amused him; she was natural, and she pleased his taste. What of it?—And what of it with regard to Adèle? He was kind, he lent her books, he read to her, he taught her drawing, and finally, he told her wonderful tales of the world of which she was ignorant, of lands which she could never hope to see. Why, then, should she not like to walk with him down the broad alley, or to sit with him in the sunny orchard, or even to haunt his study like a busy elf? His look had never yet told her that she was not welcome there; far from it—it had ever held another language. But for all that Jeannette was uneasy. She “did not like it,—it would not end well; no, no, it would not.” She watched incessantly; night and day her ears were open to hear, her eyes to see; they heard, they saw nothing, save gay and innocent speeches, save free and fearless looks. The world, indeed, might have misconstrued both, for the world has such sharp eyes that it can see anything. But its suspicions, its blame, could not reach Mr. Osborne and his little friend. The world had not even a foot in the Manor of Courcelles. Jean watched like a dragon at the stone gate; M. Morel had been forbidden the garden. The fondest, the most jealous of lovers could not have wished to possess his mistress in a more perfect solitude than that in which Mr. Osborne enjoyed the society of Adèle.

That he really enjoyed it, that he was fond of her, were two facts very apparent to Jeannette; yet he was not in love, that she

saw too. No, it was not love; Mr. Osborne had been in love before, and what he now felt he had not experienced since his boyish days; this was friendship, sweet as honey, pure as dew; his first strong, warm affection as a man. There was goodness in him, but tempered by mistrust. Thus his good will had shone on all, broad, full, impartial, like the sun at noon. He had had inveterate dislikes and some aversions, but no preferences until he met with this little girl, and for her he conceived and cherished a true and cordial feeling, perhaps because in her he could believe entirely. "If he would only not be always after her," groaned Jeannette. But Mr. Osborne had no idea of laying himself under such restraint. Thus, he no sooner discovered that every Sunday morning Adèle and Jeannette went up to a little church in the mountains, than he deserted the parochial church of Nantua to frequent the same little temple, at the same hour. He did not go or return with them; but half way down the wild and solitary path, they found him sitting, waiting for Adèle; as he said it himself, there could be no doubt about it. If he liked it, so did she. She liked to take his arm and walk down the narrow path with him, whilst Jeannette followed behind. She liked to hear him talk of religion, as he often talked to her; it pleased him to speak, her faith was so fervent, so naïve; it pleased her to listen, his views were so broad, so large, so happy. "Oh, Jeannette," she often said, "I feel good when he talks to me so. His looks, his voice, his words, convince; persuasion falls from his lips like the pearls and roses from the lips of the good girl in the fairy tale."

"Mademoiselle," began Jeannette, who knew well enough that love is never more dangerous than when he puts on a pious cloak.

"I tell you he should have been a Priest," pursued Adèle; "he laughed this morning because I told him so, but he should. Oh, why is he not a Bishop, a Missionary, a Martyr?"

This rather comforted Jeannette.

"A Bishop!" she thought; "there never will be any making out that girl."

She was meditating, however, how best she might put a stop to these delightful Sunday walks, when a much more alarming attempt was made by Mr. Osborne.

He had just then little to do. He was fond of boating; he liked to row idly on the lake, and linger there for hours. Adèle would have liked it too, but she virtuously resisted all his invitations, until one day, the temptation proving too strong, she said, "Yea, that she would go with him to-morrow."

Great was Jeannette's dismay on hearing of this. She did not argue with Adèle; she went straight to Mr. Osborne and boldly remonstrated with him, and pathetically entreated him not to insist. Mr. Osborne was annoyed, but he was not offended.

"Mademoiselle Adèle is a mere child," he said; "and no man of my age could think of her otherwise than as a child without folly. She looks, too, more childish than she is; and the world must be both wicked and mad to have a thought of harm. Besides, you will accompany her, of course." He did not add that this first invitation should also be his last; but his manner convinced Jeannette that he meant as much, and, comforting herself as well as she could, she submitted. With her little mistress she did not attempt to remonstrate. Adèle was very amiable whilst she could have her way; but Adèle was apt to be sharp and imperious when she was contradicted; and Mr. Osborne was a very sensitive subject with the young girl. Any allusion to him and love sent the blood up to her cheek, and an angry light to her eyes. Jeannette was therefore satisfied with inquiring where Monsieur Osborne was to take Mademoiselle?

"I am to choose between the Roche aux Fées and Saint Magloire," replied Adèle, in great glee. "Is it not delightful?"

"For Heaven's sake, Mademoiselle, do not go with Monsieur Osborne to the Roche aux Fées!" exclaimed Jeannette, much alarmed.

Adèle opened her eyes, and asked why so? but more urgently than before Jeannette repeated—"Oh, do not go with Monsieur Osborne to the Roche aux Fées."

"Indeed, then, I will, Jeannette, unless you give me a good reason against it."

"Ah, Mademoiselle," groaned Jeannette, "is it possible you do not know the story of that place? but if you did, you would never dream of going—never!" added Jeannette, shutting her eyes and groaning again.

The curiosity of Adèle was roused; she insisted upon knowing this singular history, and at length Jeannette spoke.

"The very name of the Roche aux Fées," she said, "shows that it is not a place to go to; the fairies have been there since the world was made, and they will be there till the end of time."

"There are no fairies," said Adèle.

"Mademoiselle cannot be sure of that. However, this is the story:—A certain fairy—a bad, wicked one, I need not say—fell in love with a gentleman who had a wife; but unable to get hold of him otherwise, she lured him to that Roche aux Fées,

which was her favourite haunt, and there she seduced him, and took him away, and he was never seen on earth again."

"Was he one of my ancestors?" demurely asked Adèle.

"Mademoiselle may laugh; it is a true story for all that; and his widow, thinking, poor thing, that he had fallen down into the torrent, and got drowned there, married a sire of Courcelles, from whom Mademoiselle is descended."

Adèle laughed gaily, and asked—

"And why should this prevent me from going to the Roche aux Fées with Monsieur Osborne?"

"Because the fairy was so well pleased with her success—bad, wicked thing—that she left a spell on the place forever. Man and woman cannot enter it together without falling straight in love with each other. Age, ugliness, deformity, make no difference; love they must, and forever. They may be married, they may be free; they can no more help loving, than they can help existing."

She spoke with much solemnity; but the blue eyes of Adèle sparkled with mischievous light.

"I know how to manage," she said demurely; "I will make you and Monsieur Osborne go in together; so I shall be quite safe."

Jeannette looked very indignant.

"Mademoiselle is laughing at her old servant," she began, but a kiss interrupted her.

"Do not be angry, Jeannette," said Adèle, soothingly, "I do not believe in your story; but for all that, I promise you that I shall never go to the Roche aux Fées with Monsieur Osborne."

Jeannette had had her way so far, but her mind was not more at ease.

"It will not end well," she thought, as she sat with a basket on her knees, at the bottom of Mr. Osborne's boat. Keenly she watched them both; Mr. Osborne was rowing the little skiff across the lake, but he was also looking at Adèle, perhaps because she sat opposite him, perhaps because he thought that she looked even more than usually pretty on that mellow autumn afternoon, and perhaps for both reasons. Adèle looked at him too, and very attentively, but in the still waters of the still lake, where she saw his face reflected. Jeannette saw both looks, and felt sorely disturbed. "If they are both fond of one another," she thought, "the harm is not so great; but if it is all of one side, and of the wrong side!"—a groan finished the thought.

"Why, Jeannette, what ails you?" asked Adèle, looking amazed.

Jeannette was spared the trouble of replying; they had crossed the breadth of the lake, and were entering a narrow creek, where Mr. Osborne moored his boat, at the foot of a chapel-crowned rock, along which a sweep of sunshine glided down, orange-red.

The same burning tint lit sky, blue mountain-top, branches of stately pine, slate roof, walls of crumbling stone, and eternal rock. Where it passed, all was ardent and bright, and where it was not, prevailed a cold, dewy freshness and gloom. The antique chapel rose on its lone rock like an oratory built there for Hermit or Cenobite. A half-ruined building attached to it behind might, indeed, have been inhabited once on a time, but the whole had a look of solitude, and seemed consecrated to one thought and one home. From the rock trickled down a chill-looking spring, that chafed and murmured as it went along, passing through shade and through sunshine like an unquiet heart, that knows not how to take the mingled woes and blessings of daily life.

With a few steps they reached the chapel-door—alas! it was broken, and forever open to any who might choose to enter. Without, the cross still rose above the porch, but within, the altar was ruined and defaced; the light burned no more above the shrine; deserted was the sanctuary, and gone were the worshippers. “And is there, then, not a handful of the faithful left in the land to fill again this little house of God?” thought Mr. Osborne, with a sense of regret.

The gay, light laugh of Adèle roused him from these thoughts. Quick and impatient as ever, she had left his side to wander in the ruin; and he now heard her saying to Jeannette—

“I will, I will!” Then a sound of feet moving to dancing time, followed. He gently pushed the door of what had once been the sacristy, and entering it, he caught sight, through another open door, of a room, or hall lit by windows partly overgrown with ivy, and with a large oaken table in the centre, that showed it to have been the refectory of the monks. But these details Mr. Osborne scarcely heeded.

On that table, where Prior, reverently bending, had once pronounced the pious Benedicite, and around which the austere monks had listened with bent eyes and folded hands, to the blessing called down on their fare of herbs from the garden, and water from the spring, Adèle, with cheeks flushed, and dark hair unloosened by the motion of the dance, was now waltzing in circles so rapid, that Mr. Osborne, surprised at the novel sight, and dazzled by her swiftness, could scarcely follow the motion of her

waving skirts and little flying feet on the table; for hardly had she reached the centre, when she was at the edge again, and seemed fairly over. In a moment, one step brought her back, but she only reached safety to seek new danger; and so she went on, evidently as much in her element as sylph in the air or salamander in the flame.

At length, wearied and breathless, she ceased. She glided down on the floor, and leaning against the edge of the table, she gathered up her fallen hair. As her hands parted it back from her face she saw Mr. Osborne, and no sooner did she see him than she flew like a bird through the ivied window nearest her. He heard her lightly fall below, lightly run away, then all was still, save the rustling leaves of ivy. Mr. Osborne smiled, but Jeannette looked disconcerted.

"Monsieur must excuse her," she said, deprecatingly; "but she is a wild little thing, and she was frightened."

"I was not at all frightened," said a saucy voice below the window, "and you are very rude to speak so of me behind my back."

"That child will drive me wild," exclaimed Jeannette, reddening.

"It is you who will drive me wild," pursued the voice of Adèle, without, "and when I die I shall haunt you."

Jeannette gave it up. With an indulgent smile Mr. Osborne left the chapel, and descending the rock, he found Adèle waiting for him below. She did seem half wild with excitement and pleasure.

"I want my drawing," she despotically cried.

He had promised her a drawing of the chapel, and brought his sketch-book, and Adèle was not going to let him escape his promise. He asked if she would not wait.

"No—no. I want my drawing—the sun is setting."

He sat down by the margin of the chill spring; above them rose the little ruin in its graceful solitude, with its background of sombre and yellow verdure and the blue clearness of the sky; behind them rippled the calm lake, and around them breathed the divine charm of autumn and of noon. It stole with subtle power over the senses of Mr. Osborne. Oh! this was not a day to draw, to sketch, to act or to live; it was a day for torpid dreams on mossy banks, around which curled leaves sere and withering; a day to remember past autumns and lost springs—springs, alas! save on such days lost and forgot. But the springs of Adèle were before her yet. She was not tired; she

was not dreamy. Autumn told her no tales, awoke no slumbering voices, plunged her in no delightful lethargy of sense and heart. Life was all alive within her, and all impatient, too.

"Why do you not draw?" she asked, assuming a frown.

But he only threw his sketch-book by, and said earnestly:

"Have you ever felt dull?"

"Perhaps I have," was her careless answer. "I am not sure—I do not remember."

"Happy doubt!" he thought, but aloud he merely said, still questioning: "Or sad?"

"Sad! Why should I be sad?" she asked, with a laugh of joyous surprise.

"Are you so very happy then?"

"Perhaps I am—I do not know; I have never thought about it; but why should I be sad? I shall be seventeen in May. I have never had the tooth-ache nor any ache whatever. When I lay my head down at night my eyes shut at once and never open till the next morning, and scarcely are they open, when I feel something within me that seems to say: 'Sing and be glad.' I can run like a deer, I can climb like a kid, I can leap like a fish, too. Jeannette and Jean are fond of me, and no one dislikes me—and the world is pleasant, and God is good.—Why, then, should I be sad?"

Her azure eyes laughed down in his face, for he sat reclining on one elbow, and she stood by his side; her white teeth shone like pearls behind her parted lips; his raised look beheld her in all the freshness and the bloom of youthful grace and beauty; it rested on her with a strange and vague delight, which the smile of his handsome mouth betrayed, for was she not part of the beauty of that autumn: the very spirit of youth, the fairest promise of life, triumphing in the midst of Nature's sadness and decay?

"Ah! what a pity," he thought; "what a mortal pity it would be to fall in love with that girl and marry her!"

"And so you will not draw?" she said, in a tone of such regret, that at once he took up his sketch-book, and proceeded to gratify her.

With breathless interest she looked on—with enthusiastic admiration she admired when he had done. But the sun was setting, a bright glow stole over the mountains and set the dark surface of the lake on fire; Mr. Osborne looked at his watch.

"Oh! not yet—pray not yet," entreated Adèle; "we will not go home till the moon is up and the stars are shining in the sky. I have stayed with you—you must stay with me."

"Where?" he asked.

She did not reply, but darted up the rocky path. He followed her swiftly, and entered with her the refectory of the ruined convent. A bright fire blazed on the broad stone hearth of the ancient chimney, and Jeannette was pouring oil in an ancient iron lamp.

"What does all this mean?" asked Mr. Osborne, turning to Adèle. She laughed and clapped her hands with delight, and threw a heap of dry sticks on the fire; they burned with a crackling noise.

"It is cold here in the evening," she said gaily, "cold and damp."

"And what is Jeannette doing there?" he asked.

"Putting chestnuts to roast in the fire," was the triumphant reply.

"And what is she pouring into that tin casserole?"

"Wine, old wine, into which Jeannette will put nutmeg, ginger, cinnamon, and every sweet spice. Oh! it is so good with the chestnuts—you will see. Jeannette, Jeannette, go for more wood. There is plenty outside."

The old woman left the room and did not return at once. The darkness of the evening had set in, and through the ivied window the early stars shone with tremulous light; again the fire flame had joyously sprung up in the old chimney, lighting up all its quaint sculptures: below demons grinned and mouthed, and above them angel faces looked pure and mild. The dancing light fell in full glow on the little figure of Adèle. She sat on a log of wood with her arms clasped around her knees, and her look dreamily fastened on the fire. Opposite her, leaning with folded arms against the sculptured stone, stood Mr. Osborne. Suddenly she looked up in his face.

"I am Cinderella," she said, "Cinderella sitting in the ashes, and you are——"

"The Prince," he suggested, a little perfidiously. Adèle impatiently shook her head.

"The Prince, no! the good fairy Godmother. Oh! how I like that story. It is beautiful! Poor Cinderella sitting in the ashes."

"Did she dance on the dinner-table?" asked Mr. Osborne.

"Why not?" promptly replied Adèle; "why should not Cinderella dance on the tables—on such tables as this, too? I have a great mind to dance on it now," she added, starting to her feet.

He laughed, and said she dared not.

"Dare not! dare not!" she cried; "do you defy me?"

He did.

Light as a bird she perched upon the table, and shaking back her curls, she looked at him triumphantly; slowly she began to move to the sound of her own voice, then, either changing her mind or remembering her chestnuts in peril, or perhaps both, she suddenly lighted down, and kneeling on the hearth, she began with dainty and agile fingers to rake them out. He wanted to assist her, but she would not allow it.

"I am mistress here," she said; "my business is to burn my fingers, and yours is to eat and drink. There, the wine is hot now."

She took a glass and a plate from Jeannette's basket. The glass she filled with the hot wine, that exhaled a spicy odour; she handed him the plate on which the chestnuts looked warm and brown, and she gazed up at him with the cordial look of a little hostess to a welcome guest. Jeannette, who had come in, threw more wood on the fire, she poured more oil into the iron lamp, and the sense of a wild, rugged comfort, mingling with the rushing of the autumn wind without, came pleasantly to Mr. Osborne, as he slowly drank the hot wine, and abstractedly looked at little Adèle.

He had forgotten all about going away; but of her own accord she gave the signal of departure.

"What a pity to go," she said, with a sigh; "but we must; light the lantern, Jeannette."

"It has been lit this half-hour, Mademoiselle."

"Has it? then give it to me; I shall know the way better than either of you."

She seized the lantern from Jeannette's hand, and darting out, scarcely gave the two time to follow. Jack-of-the-lantern was a better guide any night than Adèle proved down the rocky path. Sharp was the remonstrance of Jeannette as she at length reached the boat, and even Mr. Osborne found something to say.

"I once saw a play acted," he said, "in which a certain sprite played a great many tricks on certain unlucky individuals, but the rocks among which he led them were painted pasteboard, and these are sharp realities."

"A play!" exclaimed Adèle, eagerly; "oh, do tell me what a play is like."

Mr. Osborne was rowing his little boat across the lake, the light of the rising moon shone on his calm face, and showed Adèle that he smiled.

"Is there but one play?" he asked.

"Ah, there must be a great many, I know; but still, what is one like? Tell me, is it true that the floor opens, and that tables come up covered with dishes, and that people drop down from the ceiling?"

"Oh, there are things more extraordinary still," he answered, gravely; "for people die singing, like so many swans, which is little short of a miracle, you know."

"Oh, that I could but see a play!" cried Adèle.

Mr. Osborne was surprised; had she really never been to a play?

"Never: do you not remember that I told you so the other day?"

But Mr. Osborne's memory was at fault.

"We were in the maze," she persisted; but this circumstantial evidence did not help him to remember. "How odd," said Adèle.

"And what a pity; I actually had orders for the play this morning. There is a company now acting at Nantua, and if I only had those orders, they were for a front box, too, I could have rowed you and Jeannette over in five minutes."

"Oh, what a pity! what a pity!" she cried; "what did you do with them?"

Mr. Osborne was not sure whether he had lit a cigar or wiped a pen, but he rather thought it must be the cigar that had consumed them.

"Ah! what a pity! But are you sure? Perhaps you did not burn them, after all."

He granted the possibility of the fact.

"Who knows but they are in your pocket still?" eagerly said Adèle.

"There can be at least no harm in trying," he good-humouredly replied; and looking in his pocket, he found, to his great surprise, that the orders were there.

"Oh, you are my good angel!" cried Adèle, enthusiastically.

"Scarcely orthodox, Mademoiselle Adèle; your good angel would never be expected to take you to a play; and yet you may be sure that your good angel himself would not find a word to say against anything you shall hear or see to-night."

But Jeannette was not going to submit to this; and she was opening her lips to inform Mr. Osborne that he might throw her into the lake at once, or turn her out of his house the next morning—she kindly left him his choice—but that to the play with

her little mistress he should not go whilst Jeannette had the breath of life, when Mr. Osborne forestalled the objection.

"The orders are for two," he said; "and as I have business in Nantua, I cannot share with you the pleasure of the evening, but I shall, of course, escort you home, and you will tell me all about it to-morrow."

Sincerely Adèle sympathized with his disappointment, and zealously did she promise to tell him every word of every play she was to see. Jeannette was silent—she could not well object; the escort of a faithful female servant is held sufficient for decorum, even in the proud but homely old French nobility; and the protection of her presence was more than sufficient for poor little Adèle; but for all that it could not end well—oh, no, it could not.

But they did not dream of evil, no presentiment warned them of coming sorrow. The evening was clear and still; a pale sky was reflected in pale waters. Between both, with steep summits cut out in uneven outlines, rose the dark mountains, darker shadows lurking at their feet. The little boat glided on softly, and Mr. Osborne looking around him, enjoyed the calm serenity of the hour. The light ripple of the water, a far star shining in the far sky, the passing of the wind through the pines of the mountains, were more to him than all Adèle could hope to see. Not so with the young girl. She saw nothing, save floating images, none of which she could grasp, but all lovely and splendid.

At length, the lake was crossed. They landed in the poor little town that faced Courcelles; they entered a dirty and narrow street, passed a white church, with white stone steps, that shone in the moonlight, and stopped before a small square building like a Doric temple, the theatre of the place. With a beating heart Adèle read the bill, "Marry for Love," a vaudeville; and "Alceste," a tragedy. The mere names sent her into a dream, from which she did not waken until she found herself sitting in a narrow box, facing a lit and murmuring house, and a stage with a brightly-painted curtain. It represented palace stairs and noble gardens, with sea and the outline of azure hills on the distant sky.

"Is that the play?" eagerly asked Adèle, turning round, but she looked in vain for Mr. Osborne. He was gone, Jeannette said. She had not time to say more. The fiddle in the orchestra struck up with a squeak, the curtain rose, and revealed a gorgeous ball-room, filled with such lovely ladies and such

gallant gentlemen, that Adèle leaned back breathless with astonishment and delight. "There never was anything like it," she whispered to Jeannette. Never, indeed, save at sixteen, on the night of a first play. She saw not the painted boards, the tinsel draperies, the shabby dresses. Youth, the marvellous enchanter, waved his wand; the boards were shining marble floors; the miserable gauze skirt was rarest lace; the threadbare velvet cloak was genoa, double piled; the diamonds were from the mines of Gulconda. And oh! more wonderful still, the quaint, wearied men were cavaliers in all the bloom and ardour of manly beauty, even as the poor, faded girls, whom they courted, were coy amongst maidens and fair amongst women. The vaudeville had many a burlesque incident, with its slight thread of romance; Adèle laughed till the tears ran down her cheek, for her sense of the ludicrous was keen; it had many a little pathetic touch, and Adèle leaned her cheek on her hand and wept slowly. It closed with three marriages—all for love—and a tableau, and Adèle had never seen anything like it, but Jeannette had.

"My young master," she said, "once took a fancy to act a play. Ah, how handsome he looked in his white satin coat, and with what an air he offered a nosegay of roses to his wife, who acted the shepherdess. But his cousin, the Marquis, kissed her hand; and it seems *that* was not in the play, and so Monsieur would have no more acting; and I believe, too, it was the cause of his first quarrel with Madame, but it did not last. I entered Madame's boudoir unawares, and I found him on his knees before her; for a gentleman then was not ashamed of kneeling to a lady, and a husband of being fond of his wife. And now people marry for love in plays, and the girl who has no dot may dress Saint Catherine's hair."

To dress Saint Catherine's hair means in French to be an old maid; twenty-five is the age fixed for that rubicon of a woman's life. Adèle heard, but did not heed her. Once more the curtain had risen—the tragedy had begun. Alcestis had offered herself for her husband; her sacrifice had been accepted; and in dirge-like accents she bade life and love farewell. Adèle did not weep—she could not, but she was thrilled through the very heart; the blood forsook her cheek; her pale lips quivered; woe, deep woe, filled her being. It was over; Alcestis was won back from the grave; once more she blest and was blest; doubly happy, for she had died, and she could live for him whom she loved.

The curtain had fallen; the stage was dark; the house was

emptying; but twice Adèle had to be addressed by Jeannette before she moved. She started up like one wakening from a dream, and went down stairs without a word. Mr. Osborne was waiting below. He looked at her from head to foot.—Where was her cloak? Jeannette uttered a cry of alarm. Mademoiselle's head had been turned by the play; she had left her cloak above, and never should she see it again. At once Mr. Osborne ran up for it.

"Oh, but how can he know the right box?"—(cloak-room there was none in the theatre of Nantua)—exclaimed Adèle.

Jeannette grumbled that he would know it sure enough, but was pacified by seeing him appear with the cloak on his arm. With a smile he put it around Adèle; and as they went down to the boat, he asked how she had been entertained?

"I do not think I have been so happy before," she said, and she seemed unable to say more. She sat in the boat with her head on her knees, and only addressed Mr. Osborne once more; to bid him good night! as they parted in the garden, and to say—

"Oh, I have been so happy to-night! Oh, what a day it has been!"

He smiled kindly, pleased with her pleasure, and he entered his study; what he found there, we may know later. The whole of that long night his lamp burned unextinguished. Alas! the dark days lulled awhile, had returned, and doubt and care shared that vigil with him.

And Adèle, too, watched; for after so much pleasure, how could she sleep? Jeannette, indeed, had succeeded in persuading her to go to bed, but she could not make her bright eyes close—she could not make her quick and lively tongue be silent.

"Jeannette, did you ever see such a beautiful creature as that Alcestis?"

"Beautiful! she was not beautiful, Mademoiselle; and at all events, you are a great deal prettier."

"Oh, Jeannette, you are dreaming!" cried Adèle, leaning upon one elbow; "she was beautiful—beautiful! and then, do you not see how she died for her husband?"

"Mademoiselle does not suppose I believe that."

"Why not?"

Jeannette answered that it was not the way of the world now—a-days for ladies to wear white dresses and no sleeves, and to die for their husbands.

Adèle sank back, and looked thoughtful.

"Jeannette," she said, after a tolerably long pause, "do you think there really are women who do not like their husbands?"

"Plenty, Mademoiselle! plenty!"

"Who would not die for them, I mean!"

"Die for them—not they!"

Adèle sighed, and thought the world must be in a sad state. Jeannette rather shortly asked why the wives were all to die for their husbands, and not the husbands for their wives? But Adèle, without answering this plain logical question, exclaimed, with some ardour—

"Jeannette, I do not think I shall ever have a husband, but if I have, oh! Jeannette, how I will love him! how I shall be ready—willing—glad to die for him any day like Alcestis—beautiful Alcestis! But what a pity," she added, changing her tone, "that her husband was not more like her! Do you know I thought he looked fat in his tunic. Now what business had he to be fat, recovering from a severe illness, and losing a good and lovely wife? I could not help thinking when I looked at him—what a pity Alcestis is not married to Monsieur Osborne."

But Jeannette, alarmed at this remark, and at the conjugal turn which the thoughts of her young mistress were taking, promptly put in—

"And why should not the husband of Madame Alcestis look fat? I dare say the poor gentleman had had the dropsy, and if Monsieur Osborne had had it too—"

"You are very tiresome, Jeannette," cried Adele, turning her flushed face towards the wall; "what put it into your head that Monsieur Osborne was to have the dropsy? it is quite ridiculous to say so."

"I hope he may never have it, for it would certainly spoil his good looks!" persisted the perverse old woman; "but Mademoiselle is sleepy, and I am tired; and I have the honour to bid Mademoiselle a very good night!"

CHAPTER XIX.

BROTHERHOOD.

MR. OSBORNE had found Robert Osborne drinking in his study. With severe aspect he greeted his younger brother. But Robert had a cool impudence which nothing could move or

disconcert. With a self-possession which a diplomatist might have envied, he said, from his chair, as the pale face of Mr. Osborne, who had entered by the garden, appeared from behind the glass door, "Why, William, where have you been all this time?"

In vain Mr. Osborne looked at him with a darkening face; in vain, good man as Adèle thought him—we need not say, once for all, that she exaggerated his virtues as well as his perfections—his lips quivered, and grew white with anger. Robert's nature was thick and impervious. The sternness of his late father, who hated him; the flattery of his mother, who feared him; the sharpness of his sisters, who laughed at him; and the severity of his brother William, who despised and disliked him as a man without intellect or honour, found Robert equally cool and insensible. Robert loved himself too tenderly and too fondly, though without romance, to care a farthing about any one. Mr. Osborne sat down, looked at his younger brother, and gravely said—

— "What brought you here, Robert?"

Robert stared.

"Did you not send for me?"

"I did not."

"Ma wrote that you did, or that you wanted me here."

"Had I wanted you, I was equal to the task of writing to you. Mrs. Osborne may have advised you to come; she can scarcely have written that I required your presence."

"Capital wine!" said Robert, pouring himself out a glass.

Mr. Osborne was leaning back in his chair;—gravely and sternly he looked at Robert.

"You have not answered me. What brought you here? I suppose you did not come without some dim intentions of some kind or other."

But Robert was thick-skinned. Such frail shafts pierced him not. He poured himself out another glass of wine—he had poured himself out a good many in his solitude—tossed it off, and setting down the empty tumbler, he stared at his elder brother; and instead of the humble confession which Mrs. Osborne had advised—instead of lamenting or excusing the shameless breach of trust of which he had been guilty, he coolly said—

"Intentions! yes, I have intentions!—I'll be a partner."

Mr. Osborne laughed disdainfully.

"I tell you I will!" shouted Robert; "reject me if you dare!"

"Dare is an awkward word, even between brothers," coolly observed Mr. Osborne, not in the least angry.

"That for the brotherhood!" cried Robert, dashing on the floor the contents of his glass, which he had filled again.

Mr. Osborne had a horror of coarseness and brutality; his brother Robert was, in every respect, antipathetic to him; but he controlled himself, and merely observed—

"You are losing your temper, Robert."

But Robert's bullying nature was quite up now.

"I tell you you dare not," he said, more aggressively than before, "reject me as a partner, and I'll compete in England. I know more of the business than you do."

"More of the money, certainly," said Mr. Osborne.

"And I'll cut the ground under your feet," pursued Robert, triumphantly. He struck the table until decanter and glasses rang again.

The clashing sound jarred on Mr. Osborne's sensitive nerves. He started up from his reclining position, and even in that moment, he could not help observing, with ill-repressed impatience:

"For Heaven's sake, Robert, leave the table alone; hit your chair if you must hit something."

"I tell you I'll cut the ground under your feet," screamed Robert, at the height of passion; "I'll not be trampled upon by you."

Indignation, pity, and scorn, passed across Mr. Osborne's pale and expressive face: pity for so much folly, for so low a nature, prevailed.

"Cut away my poor boy," he said; "you are very welcome."

The sad significance of his tone startled even the dulness of Robert; but he said nothing; Mr. Osborne resumed.

"To make your task the easier, I shall withdraw and leave you sole master of the field. What you have made of the English business; what confidence you will inspire all with; what trust will be reposed in your sagacity and your honour, after the manner in which you have repaid the trust of your elder brother—I need not tell you."

He spoke with undisguised irony. Robert heard him aghast; his sallow face turned pure yellow and lengthened visibly.

"You are jesting," he said at length, giving him a doubtful glance; "matters cannot be so bad as all that."

"I am in earnest," replied Mr. Osborne, once more raising himself up from his reclining attitude, and speaking with marked sternness; "I tell you that you have all but ruined me, and that you shall not ruin me outright."

"Withdraw!" surlily said Robert; "much you know of business. What if you cannot?"

Mr. Osborne turned very pale; his white lips quivered; for a picture of dishonour and ruin flashed before him. Had Robert been more guilty than he had thought.

"What do you mean?" he asked, at length.

The subtle arts of a deceiver were not Robert's forte; his nature was gross and blunt; the truth rose to his lips, but Mr. Osborne's white face and angry eyes startled and alarmed him. He thrust his hands in his pockets, and whistled carelessly.

"Ah! bah!" he said; "stay or withdraw—what is it to me."

"Robert, are those bonds safe?" asked Mr. Osborne.

"Oh! ay, safe enough."

Asseverations would not have deceived him; this careless tone could not remove his lurking suspicion.

"Robert—Robert," he said, raising his hand with some menace. "The rest is nothing—that—no, that I could not forgive."

"Why, what would it be to you?" asked Robert, with a sneer.

"Say, rather what would it be to you!" replied his brother: "a journey to the colonies."

"Why, who could prove it?"

"I could," said Mr. Osborne. Inexorable looked his clear cut face.

Robert stared, then burst out into a loud laugh, took another glass of wine, and finally saying he was tired, he rose and withdrew.

"Ah! what an inheritance!" groaned Mr. Osborne, as the door closed upon his younger brother. He felt sick and weary of his hard task. Disgust and contempt had prevented him from reproaching Robert with a treason which he had partly accomplished; the details were not yet known to Mr. Osborne, of the object he could have no doubt. Robert had framed a grossly conceived plot to supplant his brother; a plot which Monsieur Morel had, though with great caution, abetted. He probably thought that the dull and gross Robert would be a more easily managed master than the proud and keen Mr. Osborne.

But treason is rarely successful. A fatality, a retributive justice, attend it. The temptation of drawing too freely had proved too strong for Robert, and had at once betrayed him; not, indeed, before much mischief was done, but in time to defeat

his intended coup d'état. Derisively Mr. Osborne perceived his aim, and promptly, and with the aid of Adèle, he defeated it for ever. The business in England had been declining under Robert's rule; he resolved to let it fall.

His measures were all taken, when Robert made his appearance in Courcelles, and Robert's threats were therefore mere matter of scorn and laughter to his elder brother, but of a scorn with which weariness blended.

"Ah! what an inheritance," he thought again, leaning his brow on his hand, and remembering with a sigh his days of careless and wandering liberty. Vain regret! His duties had but begun; the thorny path was yet but half cleared: leaving to the Future to reveal the mischances which he felt brooding, Mr. Osborne turned his thoughts to the Present. For Robert had consented to bring a sort of statement of his misdeeds, which Mr. Osborne found on his table. That it was garbled and insincere, he could not doubt; yet, such as it was, how much it revealed! He could not sleep. He sat up all night, restless and anxious; he sat up until the next morning found him the same prey to tormenting suspense. "He dared not have done it," he thought; "he dare not."

Mr. Osborne was pacing his study up and down; his brow was knit and overcast, his look was weary and sad, when Adèle burst in upon him bright and joyous.

"I know all about them,—I can tell you every word," she cried; but she paused, silenced by his pale, worn face; her tongue was mute, and her wistful look that sought his, plainly said, "My friend, what ails you?"

"I have had unpleasant news," he said. Adèle drew nearer to him. She was sorry,—very sorry. He smiled sadly. "I am used to it," he replied; "life is made up of toil and cares, of trusts betrayed, and ill-placed confidence; and habit," he added, pausing, "reconciles us to it all."

"Does it?" she asked, looking up in his face.

He gently laid his hand on her head.

"May it never reconcile you," he said.

Adèle saw that he looked tired; she saw his table covered with papers, and she guessed the truth.

"You sat up all night!" she exclaimed, "and I—oh, I slept so soundly."

He said he was glad of it; but Adèle seemed disturbed and

sorry. Could she really do nothing for him?—Write no letters, make up no accounts?—He did not know how faithful and how secretive she could be.

"But I can imagine it," he said, smiling.

"Well, then, give me something to do," she asked, ardently.

"But there is nothing to do. I have done it all last night," he gently answered.

"How tiresome! you do everything for me; and I—I can do nothing for you."

"Well, perhaps I may find something for you to do now, for here is Jean coming with more letters, I suppose."

Adèle looked over her shoulder, and saw Jean standing at the head of the little balcony that led to the garden. He gave her a wistful look—why was she there?—But he brought no letters for his master.

"Mademoiselle Osborne and her maid are come," he said, in a submissive voice.

"Ah, how tiresome!" thought Adèle, with a sigh; but Mr. Osborne's clouded brow cleared; he smiled, and looked pleased.

"Bring them round this way," he said; "what, will you not stay and see my little girl?" he added, as he saw Adèle following Jean out of the room.

At once she turned back with joyous surprise.

"Your little girl!" she cried; "it is your little girl!"

"Of course it is; she has lost the aunt with whom I had left her, so I have sent for her."

Adèle clapped her hands, and looked delighted.

"I am so glad!" she cried, "I am so glad! I did so wish for your little girl to come. I am so glad."

She had not time to dwell on this joyous theme: steps were heard on the gravelled garden paths, a childish voice asked in broken French, questions to which mature Parisian tones gave replies. In a few moments more a brown middle-aged woman in white cap, and a serious little girl in deep mourning, appeared on the balcony. A natural instinct of delicacy made Adèle retire to the background of the room; Mr. Osborne advanced; he took up his child in his arms; he attempted to kiss her, and was received with a kick and a scream.

"The man shall not kiss me!" cried Miss Osborne, desperately; "he shall not!"

Adèle looked bewildered and alarmed; but Mr. Osborne only laughed. The French *bonne* argued—it was not a man, it was Mademoiselle's papa; and at length Lilian held up her cheek,

and sulkily submitted to the paternal caress. Mr. Osborne untied her bonnet-strings, placed her in his chair, and smoothing the hair from her brow, he looked at her attentively. He had not seen her for three years, and he found her altered and improved. She was a dark-haired, dark-eyed child, strikingly like her father, and though a little pale, remarkably beautiful. As Mr. Osborne looked at this living image of himself, cast in the frail and tender mould of childhood, his eye softened. He sat down, and taking his little girl on his knee, he caressed her tenderly. The seriousness of Lilian's face partly relaxed, and she condescended to smile, and even to speak.

"Who is that little girl?" she asked, looking over at Adèle, whom her father had forgotten.

"Mademoiselle de Courcelles is not a little girl," he said, smiling, "she is a young lady. How do you like her?"

He spoke in French. Lilian gave Adèle a solemn, attentive look that made her heart beat. What if Monsieur Osborne's child should take a dislike to her?

"She is very pretty," at length said Miss Osborne, who thereby showed, that like her papa, she had a decided liking for a pretty face.

Adèle was advancing; she reddened, and half drew back. Mr. Osborne smiled, and persisted—

"Do you like her?"

"Oh, yes," was the cool reply, uttered without enthusiasm; for Miss Osborne was like her papa in that too. She had few strong partialities. Mr. Osborne, nevertheless, asked if she would not give the lady her hand? and Lilian, attracted perhaps by the fair young face of Adèle, did not merely give her her hand, but held up her cheek to be kissed.

"Where are your toys?" she asked.

"I have no toys. I am not a little girl!" rather indignantly replied Adèle; "I am old, quite old."

But Lilian did not mind her.

"Oh how pretty!" she cried, touching with her childish finger a little gold brooch which Adèle wore in her collar, and which Lilian's feminine eyes had at once spied out. It was very small and very light; it was also the only ornament of any kind which Adèle possessed: but at once she unfastened it, and pinning it in Lilian's dress, she said, with joyous readiness—

"Take it; it is yours."

Lilian had been spoiled, and she accepted the gift very coolly. She was pleased, and she said, "Thank you!" but to be present—

ed with what she admired was a matter of course. Lillian's father, however, looked up at the donor, and smiled so kindly, that Lillian's *bonne* at once concluded Lillian was going to have a new mamma, and though Adèle had no such thought, she reddened, half ashamed at a look so friendly.

"*Bon sang ne peut mentir*," said Mr. Osborne; "you are of a generous race, Mademoiselle Adèle, and give you must."

"I am hungry," said Lillian, jumping down from his knee; and, taking the hand of Adèle, she evidently expected to be led away to where she could find something to eat.

Mr. Osborne had probably had enough of the paternal, or he had, perhaps, other cares on his mind, for he let Lillian go.

"Are you his little girl?" asked Lillian, as she descended the steps with Adèle.

"But I am not a little girl," replied Adèle, rather vexed.

"Mademoiselle is a young lady," began the *bonne*, but Lillian interrupted her.

"What is your name?" she asked.

"Adèle de Courcelles."

"And what are you?" continued Lillian.

They were crossing the garden to re-enter the house. Adèle looked around her, and smiled wistfully. What was she in the home her ancestors had reared?—where her grandsires and her grandames had flourished? She stooped over the little stranger, and she softly kissed the future mistress of Courcelles.

"I hope you will be very happy here," she said.

But a pettish wish that she had something to eat, was Lillian's only reply.

"Poor little thing, she is hungry!" said Adèle.

At once she led her into the house, and with the same zeal, though without the same necessity, which she had showed on the evening of Mr. Osborne's arrival, she superintended the first meal which Lillian took in her father's dwelling. Mr. Osborne looked in whilst Lillian was eating in the Hall, smiled abstractedly at the hospitable anxiety Adèle showed in heaping the child's plate, and after lingering a few moments, and saying a few kind words, he left them. Adèle felt disappointed. Monsieur Osborne did not seem to her to be sufficiently fond of his little girl. She did not think so, when, without seeking it, she suddenly came upon them that afternoon in the garden. Lillian had of her own accord gone to seek her papa; and Adèle thought them both in his study, when she caught sight of them in one of the many arbours of the garden. Mr. Osborne was sitting on a bench, and Lillian sat on his knee; her shyness

and his coldness were all gone. Her arms were clasped around his neck—their two faces were meeting in a fond embrace. He was covering her cheek and her brow with kisses, which Lillian received with childish screams, half of pleasure, half of mimic anger. She said he should not, and he said he would. She slapped him ruthlessly, and he only laughed at her wrath. At length a treaty of peace was concluded; he promised to be quiet; she promised to behave herself. A calm kiss sealed their reconciliation; gently his lips sank on her cheek; softly her childish hand stroked and patted his. The heart of Adèle swelled and rose; tears started to her eyes. They had not seen her; she turned into an alley, and sitting down on a bench, she felt very solitary.

Why was she not loved? why did no one caress her? "Happy little girl!" she thought, "happy little girl!" She was not jealous; Mr. Osborne had been very kind, but nothing in his kindness could have authorised the feeling. She was only a stranger, and his little girl was his flesh and blood. No, she was not jealous; she was not envious, either. She would not have robbed Lillian of anything Lillian had, not for the world; but she felt very solitary; she felt that it would have been very delightful to have been thus loved; very pleasant to receive a fondness so endearing. "Happy little girl!" she thought again, "oh, yes, very happy." But can sadness linger long with youth? The song of a bird perched on a neighbouring tree first drew, then diverted, her attention. The day sparkled with mingled dew and sunshine; the mountains rose clear in the keen blue sky; below, the lake lay calm and still, scarcely rippled by the pure fresh breeze. The very quickness of the air gave every object a life more distinct. The old moss-grown statues around her seemed to feel, like her, the genial warmth of the sun; everywhere life prevailed joyous and triumphant. Adèle shook her tears away. "The very bird sings and rejoices," she thought, and she broke forth into a joyous carol, which the appearance of Mr. Osborne coming towards her quickly interrupted. He was alone; yet with the familiarity of a friend he sat down on the bench by her.

"Always merry!" he said, smiling.

"Not always," replied Adèle.

"But never sad," he pursued, "at least, so you said yesterday, did you not?"

"Yes, but I feel lonely sometimes, not often, but sometimes. I am glad your little girl is come to Courcelles, for now I know that you will really stay here."

"For some time, at least."

"For ever," she said, "not for some time."

He smiled, and did not think it likely. The shadow of a cloud passed over the sunny face of Adèle, but impatiently shaking her head, she said—

"Well, well, you are not gone yet."

"I may go any day," said Mr. Osborne, very gravely, "and never return."

Adèle looked disconcerted, then smiled incredulously.

"You are jesting!" she said, quickly, "but I wish you would not—I wish you would not."

Mr. Osborne looked firmly in her face.

"On my word I am not jesting," he said; "I am in sober earnest."

She looked at him mute and stricken. Mr. Osborne seemed very much troubled.

"Child," he said, "why are you disturbed? Life is made up of sorrows and separations, and both have to be borne."

Adèle looked humble and ashamed, and tears trembled on her dark eyelashes; her downcast eyes were laden with grief.

"Do not be angry with me," she said.

"Angry!" exclaimed Mr. Osborne, reddening a little; "did I speak with anger?"

"I cannot help it," she pursued, "you have been so very kind; and then what shall I do when you are gone? with whom shall I read, talk, and walk then?"

"How did you do before I came?" he asked, smiling.

"Ah, I had never had a friend then; I was like Adam in Paradise—I did not know Eve—I did not care about her."

"The comparison would be prettier reversed," said Mr. Osborne, unable to repress a little sarcasm.

"Let us reverse it, then," replied Adèle, not a whit discomposed; "it always comes to the same thing, for you know what I mean."

This was true enough; and without pursuing the subject, Mr. Osborne merely said, in his habitually kind tone,—

"Providence will send you another friend; you are too good and too pretty not to marry some day."

"Marry without money!" interrupted Adèle, amazed at the idea, and laughing gaily, too; "oh, no! no one marries without money; and I have nothing—not a sou," she added, with a sort of triumph in her poverty.

"And do you really mean to say," observed Mr. Osborne,

slightly surprised, "that you do not think ever to marry, because you have no money?"

"I am sure of it," she confidently replied; "Jeannette and Cousine both say so, and they ought to know."

"Would you wish to marry?" he pursued, rather earnestly.

"But since it is no use wishing," she said, impatiently.

"But if it were?" he insisted.

"Ah, bah!" said Adèle, throwing her hand behind her shoulder with careless grace, "I shall be seventeen in May; what need I think about all that?"

He smiled and his brow cleared. "She is but a child," he thought.

"But I wish you would not go," she said, with a chagrined look; "I wish you would not."

"Well, and perhaps I shall not," he replied; "it may be the will of Providence that I should stay here, and in that case I should wish——"

What Mr. Osborne wished Adèle never knew; for Jean interrupted the discourse by bringing his master a packet of letters. "Perhaps he will want me," thought Adèle, remembering his words that morning, and though she rose from the bench, she did not leave the alley.

The mere look of the letters had brought a cloud to Mr. Osborne's brow; he had that morning received a partial account of Robert's misdeeds, and he now expected a fuller and more severe narrative. He looked at the directions and at the seals of the three epistles, and could not make up his mind to open them. With the horror, with the loathing and disgust, with which meanness, treachery, and cupidity ever inspired him, he at length compelled himself to break the seals, and read the full history.

"How long he is reading those letters!" thought Adèle.

She looked round; he was not reading, but he held a letter in his hand, and he was pale as death. Adèle looked without knowing whether to advance or retire: the friendly instinct prevailed. She went up to him, he took her hand within his, and he gave her a look so sad, so dreary, that her heart sank within her. Trembling, she sat down by him, and asked what had happened. Still he kept her hand within his, still looked at her, and spoke not.

"You frighten me!" she cried; "what is it?" He did not answer. "Is it death?" she added. He shook his head. "Have you lost all your money?"

"No, child, I have not."

"Then what can it be?"

"Never trust a friend," he replied; "never trust a friend, my little Adèle."

"Never trust a friend!" she repeated after him; "and why so?"

"Never trust a friend," he said again, "or the best will deceive and betray you to sorrow."

"I have no friends to trust," said Adèle, shaking her head with a sad sagacity; "but you had, and they have deceived you, I see. God forgive them! the bad, the wicked people."

She spoke with such earnestness, that tears filled her eyes.

"Never love a friend, never serve a friend," he said; "he will turn against you in the end. He will be saved, and you will be the victim."

"But how bad those people must have been," cried Adèle, indignantly; "how bad to make you say such cruel things."

He dropped her hand, and folded his arms a little gloomily.

"Pray do not look so unhappy," said Adèle, drawing nearer to him; "and pray believe I never could betray you."

He had not heard her; he rose, and saying coldly, "Pray excuse me, I must go and speak to my brother Robert," he left her.

"Ah! his brother is here!" thought Adèle, beginning to understand what ailed him.

Mr. Osborne went straight to his study; Robert was there drinking as on the preceding evening. Mr. Osborne removed the bottle with a severe hand, and faced his brother, stern and pitiless as Rhadamanthus.

"I know all," he said.

A sullen meaning came over Robert's sensual, bloated face. He was not without a sort of dull conscience; it had been pricking him, and he had been endeavouring to drown its murmurs in wine.

"Transport me if you like," he said, doggedly.

Mr. Osborne bowed his head, folded his arms, and communed with God in strange anguish of spirit and of heart: "Help me—guide me," he prayed. "I confess myself a sinner every day before Thee. My wisdom is nought, or I had not fallen into this pit and become the prey of what I despised." He was more calm when he looked up. He went to his cash-box; he took out a bundle of notes, and placed them in his brother's hand, without a word. But Robert understood him. It was condemnation, reproof, dismissal, forgiveness, all in one. He rose and silently turned away.

"Good-bye," said Mr. Osborne; and he held out his hand.

"Good-bye," said Robert, grasping it half in shame, half in cordiality, "I am sorry about these bonds—I see it cuts you—on my word, I am."

Mr. Osborne did not answer one word. He knew that over the nature of Robert his nature never could exercise a lasting or beneficial influence; that his silence was more impressive than would have been the keenest reproof, the mildest preaching.

"You'll think better of me yet," said Robert, as he turned away.

Thus the two brothers parted. The offender slightly affected, yet in reality not much moved; the offended one silent and cold, though hurt to the very heart.

Mr. Osborne sank down in his chair. Ruin, disgrace, dishonour were before him.

"Oh, God!" he groaned, "had I but been spared that; had ruin taken any other form it seems as if I could have borne it patiently; but that—Oh! that!"

He leaned his head on his hand. He looked at the past, at the future. "Oh! ties of blood!" he thought, "are you not as often a curse as a blessing?" And raising his eyes, he saw Adèle standing on the threshold of his room, gazing at him thence with a wistful look, and holding Lilian by the hand.

CHAPTER XX.

ABSENCE.

With a smile he beckoned them both in. Adèle advanced hesitatingly.

"I have brought you your little girl," she said.

"To comfort me," he replied; "why the sight of your face would do that."

He took Lilian on his knee; he placed Adèle in a chair by his side, and he looked at her with a gaze that had in it something more than fixed attention. If Adèle had thought of love, she might have fancied that this was a lover's look; and, if she had known anything about love, she would have been very sure that it was not. But she thought nothing.

"I think you like me," he said at length.

"Ah! you know I do," she cried, warmly.

"Good, sincere little creature! Yes, I do really believe that you are fond of me."

Was he speaking to her or to his own thoughts? He took her hand in his.

"Would you like to live here with me, and with my little girl?" he asked; "I mean for ever?"

"Will you stay here—will you really stay?" she asked, with sparkling eyes.

"I will, but will you?"

"Why not?" she asked, openly meeting his keen and penetrating look.

His next remark was not much to the purpose.

"When truth leaves her well," he said, "she will borrow Mademoiselle Adèle de Courcelles's brown frock. "Lilian," he added, turning to his little girl, "I am going away; be good, and let that young lady give me a good account of you when I return."

"Is she good?" asked Lilian.

"As good as she is pretty," he said, rising and looking at his watch.

But Adèle only heard that he was to leave.

"You are going?" she cried, chagrined. "Oh! when will you come back?"

"As soon as I can."

"Ah! poor Monsieur Osborne," thought Adèle, taking Lilian's hand and leading her away, "they will not let him be quiet."

She went down with the child to the garden, and stayed there until she heard Jean leading out Joli, Mr. Osborne's bay horse; she then went with the child to the gate, to bid Mr. Osborne adieu. He was not there yet, but Joli saw her and neighed, for they were old friends and true.

"Poor Joli," said Adèle, patting him fondly; "I have no sugar in my pocket to-day, Jeannette has locked the cupboard. But I will save some for you when you come back. Bear your master faithfully, Joli, and bring him back soon, very soon."

"What are you saying to Joli?" asked Mr. Osborne's voice.

She turned round; he stood on the threshold of the Manor; he saw tears on her face; they sparkled on her rosy cheeks like dew on a flower.

"You soft-hearted little thing," he said, wiping those tears away with a gentle hand.

"Do not ride Joli too hard," she said; "do not use the spur and the whip. He is faithful, I am sure he is."

He pushed away the hair from her clear forehead, and he exclaimed, half sorrowfully:

"Oh! my little friend, why are you so young?"

"The young are true," she said, warmly. "The old betray."

He pressed her hand; he kissed Lilian; and without another word he rode away. But he soon looked back. The Manor was reddening in the evening sun; the glass windows glittered bright; the far snowy mountains shone on the sky; the mists were curling on the lake; the road sparkled with dew; and Adèle stood on the steps of the Manor looking after its master. Lilian had gone in to play in the garden, but Adèle had remained to see him as long as she could.

A month had passed away.

The afternoon was wintry and bleak. The wind moaned around the Manor with a low, sad wail; with a lament it passed through the lonely avenues of the old garden, and died away on the grey lake.

"Mademoiselle will not think of going out on this cold day," Jeannette had said. Adèle had not answered; she disliked useless argument, but no sooner was Jeannette's back turned than she darted out and lightly ran down the broad alley. She paused and looked around her. Strangely altered seemed the aspect of the garden. The evergreen hedges had a nipped look; the frost of the cold autumn nights had withered the flowers on their frail stems; they hung their languid heads, all heavy with a chill, white, briny dew, which no ray of sunshine had dried that day. Oh! for the summer dew and the summer sun to give them a second birth. Vain wish! No more would they blossom in the fragrance and joy of their being.

"Poor flowers, poor flowers!" thought Adèle, turning away with a sense of pain; but everywhere sad images met her. The withered leaves gathered around her feet, and the keen wind that passed over her head whirled them along the path with a low, rustling sound; the statues, in their Grecian robes, green with moss and sullied with mildew, made her shiver. Was this the happy wilderness where she had walked by Mr. Osborne's side, where the sun had felt so pleasant and so warm on the old, broken stone benches in the ancient arbours?

"Oh! how long he has been gone," she sighed; "how very long!"

She went on. On reaching the stone balustrade that over-

looked the lake, she paused again and looked down vaguely. She watched the grey clouds that floated within it; away they went with a sullen mien, to pass above the brown mountain peaks which she saw there too. And other mountains beyond these stretched along that cloudy sky, a snowy ridge with blue and yellow tints, and broken here and there by white mists that curled around them, pale and thin, and gathered into clouds as they descended. She looked up and saw the same sad and bleak landscape. Oh! was this gloomy water the clear green lake which the romantic chapel overlooked? were those heaps of barren rock the verdant mountains that gave it their own cool hue, and shaded it on hot summer noons?

"Oh! how long—how very long he has been gone," sighed Adèle; "will he never come back?"

Fitful and unhappy she turned away. But in vain she wandered in the alleys; in vain she sought the maze, the orchard—he was still gone, and Adèle was still unquiet.

From the pain of his absence she learned what the delight of his presence had been. It was a want which nothing could supply, not even Lilian, though Lilian was very fond of Adèle now, and never so well pleased as when she could be with her. But Lilian could not be dear, like Lilian's father. His goodness, his kindness, had sunk for ever in the heart of Adèle. "He is my friend," she often thought; "and I must love my friend. But I wish he would come back," she now querulously added.

"Mademoiselle Lilian," cried the angry voice of the French *bonne*, "come in directly."

But Mademoiselle Lilian had seen Adèle, and was running gaily towards her; and Adèle, though she received her with a kiss, said that she must go in, or her papa would be angry.

"Papa will never come back," gaily said Lilian, as she was once more surrendered into the hands of her *bonne*. "Never—never."

"Yes he will," said Adèle, a little indignantly, "he has said so."

Yet she sighed as she turned away and entered the room where Jeannette spun by the warm fireside.

Jeannette looked at her little mistress's cold white face; but no remonstrance, half-fond, half-angry, passed her lips. She only spun more slowly, whilst Adèle sat down on a stool and looked at the bright wood fire on the brown hearth.

"How long Monsieur has been gone," said Jeannette.

"A whole month!" sighed Adèle.

"And he has never written to Mademoiselle?"

"Ah! why should he take that trouble?"

"Monsieur has been so very kind to Mademoiselle."

"Jeannette, what are you going to say?" interrupted Adèle, reddening.

"Nothing to displease Mademoiselle. But Monsieur has been so very kind; for instance, about that pretty ivory thing which he brought from Lyons, after having bought it of Pierre."

"It was Cousine's gift!" cried Adèle.

"Bought with his money," persisted Jeannette; "I know it—I am sure of it—I can prove it."

"It was he gave it to me," cried Adèle; "he — he —" she seemed unable to say more.

"Oh, that is not all," continued Jeannette; "Mademoiselle is fond of reading, and Monsieur lends her books; but does Mademoiselle suppose that these books come here for his use? They come for Mademoiselle, and go without having been so much as opened by him."

"How can you tell?"

"I have not dusted them for days, or I have put them in a certain way, and the dust has remained on them, and they have not been moved."

"And it is for me he makes those beautiful books come from Paris?—For me! for me!"

"Oh, that is not all," continued Jeannette; "I might go on for ever; but one thing more will suffice. Mademoiselle has not forgotten the night of the play, and how Monsieur found the orders in his pocket, and how surprised he was to find them there. Ah, Mademoiselle! Mademoiselle! the best of gentlemen can be very deceitful—very deep. I myself saw a lad on that very morning hand him those orders, and the change of the Napoleon with which he had bought them at Nantua; and Monsieur, who did not see me, put them in his pocket very carefully."

"Then he had got them for me—on purpose for me!" cried Adèle.

"Perhaps it was for me," said Jeannette, smiling; "perhaps, too, it was to see how I liked the play; how I laughed, how I cried, that Monsieur, who had such urgent business in Nantua, sat in a corner of the pit until it was over."

But Adèle had not heard her. She had bowed her head on her knees, and she cried passionately.

"Mademoiselle! Mademoiselle!" exclaimed Jeannette, alarmed, for she had never seen her little mistress weep as she wept then.

Adèle looked up.

"Oh, Jeannette!" she said, "it is the kindness—it is the kindness!" She rose, and walked about the room. "He must not be so kind," she said, "or I must not know it, or I shall do or say something foolish, that will make him laugh at me, and make me run away ashamed from his sight. No, no; there must be no more of all this, or I shall be undone."

Jeannette wished she had not spoken. She had not imagined that her little mistress would feel it so strongly. But Adèle, of her own accord, calmed down and laughed at herself. She sat again on her little stool, and, clasping her arms around her knees, she looked at the fire and smiled.

"Jeannette," she said, "you told me once that kindness could melt the heart as the sun thaws the snow; that it made the strong weak as a little child: and it is true, I feel it now."

"Mademoiselle must not think of that," cried Jeannette, sorely troubled; she must think that it is not right for even the best of gentlemen to spend money on a young lady who is nothing to him. If it were right, he would not hide it so carefully. Does Mademoiselle know how much Monsieur Osborne has spent to please and amuse her?"

Adèle did not answer.

"Three Napoleons for the ivory case and what was in it; no less than five and six francs at a time for carriage of books; and nine francs fifty centimes for the play. I do not believe that, in all, Monsieur can have spent less than five or six gold Napoleons. Holy Virgin!" added Jeannette, reddening, "that any man's money should be spent on Mademoiselle—on Mademoiselle, who is bound to be doubly proud, because she is poor."

"You are right there, Jeannette; but oh, why do you think so much of the money—so little of the kindness—when that is the thing, you know?"

Jeannette shook her head.

"Do you think," pursued Adèle, looking at the fire, which shone back in her eyes, "do you think that because I am silent, I never think of my strange lot in this world? I am a noble, and of the noblest. The revolutionists burned our genealogical tree in the court of the Manor, but they could not burn our name from the chronicles of the province, from the history of France."

The heart of Jeannette swelled.

"There is not in all France a lady who can crow over Mademoiselle, so far as birth goes," she said, proudly.

"And what does it avail me?" asked Adèle. "Oh, Jean-

nette, God has chastised the fierce De Courcelles; He has humbled their pride in the dust. They were a warlike race who lived but for fighting; iron was a sword by their side, or a gauntlet in their hand. They were insolent to the strong, and pitiless to the weak; they sent their daughters into cloisters, and they wedded all their sons, that their name might live for ever. And what has happened? Iron is turned into money on their land by a foreign speculator, whom they would have scorned. Their sons have died, and left no posterity; their name has fallen into distaff, as the old saying is; all the family hopes, all the family honours, have gathered on one head, and that the head of a woman—of a little girl. Through her they are now humbled into the weakness of woman and the carelessness of childhood. She is poor amongst the poor, a little dependant, friendless, and unloved. Why, there is not a peasant's son in all Courcelles that would have her for his wife, for the girl whom he marries has at least an acre of land, a cow, and half-a-dozen hens. And what has Adèle de Courcelles? Not a foot of earth, not a goat on the mountain-side, not a bird in a cage. Do not cry, Jeannette; God is good to all, and He is just. The sun lights every corner of the earth, but he does not shine on all the whole round earth at once. We might as well ask—why is the earth round? as wonder why God takes from some to give to others. From me he has taken nothing; all was gone before I was born; and that is why, perhaps, I cannot trouble my head much about a rank and a fortune I never really lost. But still, Jeannette, I do remember sometimes that I am alone, friendless, poor. I remember it when the sun is shining, when I am singing in the garden; and if I did not sing twice as fast, I really do think that I should cry. I did almost cry the other day when I saw Mr. Osborne kissing his little girl. Oh, do not wonder, Jeannette, that when you tell me of one who spends his money to please a little friendless girl, who takes the trouble of inventing ways to instruct and amuse her without humbling her pride, who, spite of heavy business and a world of cares, gives her a place in his thoughts, and a corner in his liking—oh, do not wonder, Jeannette, that I cry from the bottom of my full heart! It is the kindness—it is the kindness!”

“Ah! Mademoiselle must not think so much of that!” sighed Jeannette; “she must not allow that great kindness.”

“And how can I prevent it?” impatiently asked Adèle.

“Mademoiselle must keep more to her room, more out of the garden, more out of the gentleman's way; and when he does not see her, he will forget her.”

Adèle looked blank.

"I cannot—I will not," she said, at length.

"Mademoiselle both can and will," insisted Jeannette; and seeing her young mistress look up at her with some haughtiness, she added, in a subdued voice:

"Because it is right."

Adèle hung her head. When she raised it, her eyes were sad, but in a calm voice she said:

"Yes, Jeannette, I will do it—because it is right."

"It seems hard to Mademoiselle now," resumed Jeannette; "but later Mademoiselle will not think so much of it; later she will remember all this as a dream, and feel pleased to think, that when she might have been foolish—like nine young ladies out of ten—she has wise, careful and prudent——"

"Here he is!" cried Adèle, starting to her feet and clapping her hands with joy; "come back—come back!"

She darted out of the room, leaving Jeannette confounded. "Ah!" she thought, with a groan: "I might have known what such promises were worth. Oh! it will not end well; you will see it will not."



CHAPTER XXI.

MONSIEUR LASCOURS'S PROMISE.

WHILST Jeannette was talking, Adèle was listening, not to her prudent speech, but to a loud knocking at the front door, which the moaning of the wind did not prevent her from hearing. Jeannette, however, heard nothing, and Jean was either deaf or asleep, for the knocking was repeated and not attended to. It was, it must be, Mr. Osborne returning after his long absence. Prudent resolves, sincere promises, fled by magic. He was come back, her friend, her kind friend, and they did not let him in! Then she would, her look and her tongue would be the first to bid welcome to the master of Courcelles. Full of joy at the thought, she sprang out of Jeannette's room, ran up a flight of steps and came down the passage, which a lamp lit. She reached the door as the knocking was repeated a third time; triumphantly she opened it, and remained mute. She saw, not Mr. Osborne, but

her cousin and godmother, Mademoiselle de Janson, alighting from a travelling-carriage.

"Is the house bewitched?" she asked tartly; "where is Jean?"

"I shall go and look for him at once, Cousine," said Adèle, her glee all over.

But she was spared the trouble of the search; Jean appeared and Jeannette too. Mademoiselle de Janson took no other notice of them than to bid them make haste and light a fire in the Hall, which she entered at once.

"And if Monsieur Osborne or the whole lot of them should come back!" thought Jeannette disturbed.

But such paltry considerations moved not her aristocratic mistress. She threw her cloak on Mrs. Osborne's favourite chair, and sank down on the sofa which Anna loved.

"Would not Madame prefer one of the rooms upstairs?" suggested Jeannette.

Mademoiselle de Janson raised her languid head and said shortly:

"Jeannette, you are a fool—do as I bid you. You will not see one of the Osbornes here for days—for weeks."

Her head sank back, her eyes closed. Jeannette left the room to obey, and Adèle remained standing before her godmother, mute and thoughtful.

"Cousine," she said, at length, "you saw Monsieur Osborne—how was he?—how did he look?"

"What is the child saying?" asked Mademoiselle de Janson, looking up amazed.

Adèle innocently repeated her questions, but the only answer she got was a sharp request to hold her tongue. "She will tell me nothing," sighed Adèle to her own thoughts, "and he will not be back for days—for weeks!"

Jeannette came in to light the fire, and having succeeded in accomplishing her task, asked if Madame would take no refreshment.

"What for?" was the sharp reply, so sharply uttered, too that Jeannette did not venture to open her lips in a hurry.

She left the room.

Adèle sat on her low stool, and looked at her godmother.

"The world is going away," sighed Mademoiselle de Janson, after a while.

Move she did not, but Adèle looked at her and at the fire, listened to the wind, and leaned her cheek upon her hand. The

last three months were a dream, her old life in the old Manor had come back. At eight Mademoiselle de Janson rang the bell, the two old servants appeared, and their mistress read the evening prayer. When it was over, Adèle held up her cheek for her godmother's cold evening kiss; but Mademoiselle de Janson said—

"Stay, child, I want to speak to you."

Adèle obeyed. Her godmother pointed to her stool, and bade her sit down, whilst she resumed her own chair.

"The world is going away," she said, "and the best and wisest thing we can do is to go away out of the world; accordingly, I have resolved to leave and relinquish Courcelles altogether."

The breath of Adèle seemed gone.

"Yes," continued Mademoiselle de Janson, "Courcelles we must leave. What should we do here any longer?"

Still Adèle was mute.

"When a thing has to be done," continued Mademoiselle de Janson, "let it be done quickly. We leave to-morrow morning before day."

"Where do we go to?" asked Adèle, speaking, at length.

"That is of no immediate consequence," was the short reply; "it is sufficient for you to know that we are going, and to get ready."

"Is it far away?" asked Adèle.

"Child, you have had your answer."

"Cousine, is it very far away?" the young girl inquired, with a wistful look.

"Go and get ready."

Adèle rose and stood before her godmother.

"Cousine," she said, with some solemnity, "is it out of France?"

"Go and get ready," was the inexorable reply.

Adèle shook from head to foot, and turned very pale.

"Cousine," she said, "you cannot mean it; you cannot mean to take me away from home, from country, without even a day's warning. You do not like me—I know it, and I do not complain of it—but still you cannot mean it."

"Child, do not be foolish," was Mademoiselle de Janson's answer; "I am your best friend, for I wish to remove you from a world of wickedness and cares, and I deal with you as Providence deals with her children. I say neither why nor how—I act, and I leave it to the future to justify me."

"This world may be wicked and full of woe," earnestly said Adèle; "but I am young and happy in it. And oh, Cousine!

though you may act secretly like Providence, are you like Providence, all powerful? And can you turn, without fear of mistake, the means you use into one certain end?"

"Truly, the world is going away," indignantly exclaimed Mademoiselle de Janson, "when a little thing of sixteen questions the wisdom of her godmother. Go to your room at once, and let me hear no more of this."

But instead of obeying, Adèle sank down on the floor at her godmother's feet. She clasped her two arms round Mademoiselle de Janson's waist, and looked up in her face with pathetic entreaty.

"Do not, Cousine," she said, "do not; it would break my heart, I assure you it would. I should die of grief, and you would not make me die, would you?"

It was one of Mademoiselle de Janson's freaks to act the stern lady now and then, but her light temper rarely allowed her to sustain the part in all its bearings. Instead of indignantly casting Adèle from her, and talking grandly of family authority, she looked at her almost kindly; and parting the hair from her forehead, she said—

"You are a pretty girl, Adèle,—a very pretty girl."

Adèle blushed, then laughed, and said demurely—

"If I am so pretty, Cousine, it would be a pity to take me out of the world."

"And I think you are happy."

"Oh, so happy, Cousine. As happy as the day is long."

Her godmother's brow grew clouded.

"As you are I was at your age," she said. "Look at me now. Oh, that some true friend had taken me in the beauty and happiness of sixteen from a world of sorrow."

Adèle was alarmed at the conclusion, and hastened to administer an antidote. With timid familiarity she unclasped her hands from her godmother's waist, and parted Mademoiselle de Janson's golden hair from her brow. She looked at her godmother as her godmother had looked at her, and archly said,—

"Ah, Cousine! what a difference—I am only pretty—you were beautiful."

"Well, well, there is something in that," replied Mademoiselle de Janson, considerably mollified; "pretty women are happy—beautiful women are born to grief."

"But I am not beautiful," urged Adèle, "I am only pretty. I shall be so happy, Cousine."

"Oh, but you are very, very pretty," said Mademoiselle de

Janson ; "and when women are so very, very pretty, it is almost as bad for them as being beautiful."

"No, no, I am not so very pretty," cried Adèle, disturbed ; "I am too little—I am not elegant, like you. My hair is dark,—it is not like yours, bright as gold. Oh, I am not so very pretty," she added, vexed at being unable to bring forward some other personal defect in order to support her cause.

"That will do, child," said Mademoiselle de Janson, a little coldly ; "get up, and do not forget to be ready by to-morrow morning."

Adèle rose without a word ; where was the use of remonstrance or entreaty ? But the blood forsook her cheek, and there came a strange light to her blue eyes.

"Cousine," she said, "my mind is made up. I will not go to-morrow morning."

Mademoiselle de Janson gave a start in her chair, and opened her eyes amazed.

"And when will you go ?" she asked.

"I will not go at all," replied Adèle.

She stood before her godmother, little, pale, resolute ; a thing of steel, which a strong hand could snap asunder, but could not bend.

"Go to your room, child," said Mademoiselle de Janson, in her gentlest tones.

Adèle obeyed. As she closed the door, she heard her godmother exclaiming with a sigh, "The world is gone away !"

Mademoiselle de Janson long remained absorbed in thought ; at length she awoke as from a dream, stretched her hand, and rang the bell. Jean appeared.

"Let everything be ready," she said, "we leave before day."

"Madame is taking Mademoiselle away," faltered Jean. His mistress stared, but did not answer. He took courage, and resumed—

"Mademoiselle is not used to travelling, and this weather—"

"Jean, do as I bid you."

Jean obeyed silently, and went to impart his troubled thoughts to Jeannette. Vainly he searched for her up and down. Jeannette was in the Hall receiving the orders of her mistress. Mademoiselle de Janson had been unusually prolix concerning the careful packing of an old ebony casket, which she desired

might be put in her trunk, so as to receive no injury; and Jeannette was wondering in her mind whether her mistress meant to depart and return no more, when, without transition, the lady added—

“And when you have done that, go up to the room of Mademoiselle Adèle, and pack up her things.”

The arms of Jeannette dropped by her side.

“Mademoiselle is going?” she said.

“Of course she is!” was the impatient reply.

But tears streamed down Jeannette's cheeks; imploringly she clasped her hands.

“Oh, leave her here—leave her here!” she said.

“Leave her here! you are dreaming, Jeannette. Go, and pack up her things at once.”

But Jeannette did not move.

“No, no, Madame!” she entreated, “no, no, you will not do that thing. You will not rob an old woman of her child; I am sure you will not!”

“I think the world is not merely going away, I also think it is going mad!” said Mademoiselle de Janson, sitting up indignantly in her chair. “What! I cannot take away my own cousin and god-daughter but there is such a wail raised around me, that Rachel lamenting her children never made more noise.”

But with strange persistency Jeannette continued—

“I am old, but I will work for her; I am only a servant, but I will protect her against a look. You do not care about her no more than the wind that blows; and she is the apple of my eye, and the darling of my heart.”

Mademoiselle de Janson looked at the old woman, and Jeannette looked at her; and in either look there was mistrust.

“Jeannette,” said the lady, “for the sake of your faithful services, I forgive you this mad talk. And now do as I bid you; go, and pack up Mademoiselle de Courcelles's wardrobe.”

She spoke grandly; a bitter smile passed across Jeannette's face, but she obeyed. When she reached the threshold of the door, she paused, and holding the half-open door in her hand, she turned and looked at her mistress—

“I know what is in your heart, Madame,” she said, “I know it.—God forgive you!—God forgive you!”

She closed the door, and sitting down on the last step of the old staircase, she sobbed and moaned with strange passion.

“I thought it was all over—all over,” she said, half-aloud.

“I thought that with old greatness old wickedness was gone.

But there are only two of them left, only two, and both are women, and one must torment the other. God forgive her!—God forgive her! I cannot.”

She rose, and still weeping as she went, she proceeded to the room of Adèle. The door was ajar; a ray of light stole out on the landing. Jeannette knocked, but received no reply. She knocked again, and still all was silent.

“She has fallen asleep over one of those books,” thought Jeannette.

She pushed the door open, and entered. A light burned on the table near the bed, where Adèle lay dressed, but asleep; one arm was thrown over her head, the other hung down by the side of the bed, and her hand still held the volume she had been reading.

“The naughty child will set fire to the house one of these days,” muttered Jeannette; but suddenly remembering on what errand she had come, she sat down and began to cry. Her sobs and her moans awoke Adèle; her eyes opened, and she sat up, gathering her fallen hair with vague surprise.

“What is it, Jeannette?” she asked, at length.

“Oh! my darling, my darling! how shall I ever part from you?” she cried, wringing her hands.

Adèle looked at her, but did not speak.

“God forgive her—God forgive her!” exclaimed Jeannette, the tears streaming down her cheek.

Nevertheless she rose, and spite her tears and her moans, she opened a chest of drawers and proceeded to empty it of its contents.

“Jeannette, what are you doing?” cried Adèle.

“Packing up Mademoiselle’s things,” groaned the old woman.

“You need not,” said Adèle, coolly; “I have made up my mind not to go. I have told MARRAINE so.”

“Ah! Mademoiselle, she will make you. Did not her grandmother make her mother marry old and ugly Monsieur de Janson, a gambler, too, who never did but one good thing, and that was to break his mother-in-law’s heart with seventeen lawsuits?”

Adèle smiled.

“Jeannette,” she said; “you and Cousine live in the past; but I, a child of the present, know these days are gone by.”

“And where is Mademoiselle going?” moaned Jeannette.

“Nowhere, I tell you,” indignantly replied Adèle; “you are very tiresome. Why will you not believe me?”

"Because I know the world! Mademoiselle is nothing before the law."

"The law is very impertinent."

"Mademoiselle cannot sell or buy. Mademoiselle cannot marry without her godmother's consent."

"I can say no, Jeannette," replied Adèle, and she set her young face into an expression of such inexorable and resolute will, that Jeannette was startled and for a moment frightened.

"Mademoiselle must not look so," she said; "it is wicked; it is sinful."

But even as she spoke the look had vanished; the face of Adèle only expressed the graceful and impatient wilfulness of a child.

"Then do not teaze me," she said, shaking her pretty head; "I tell you I will stay here. I will, until Monsieur Osborne comes, and he will not let me go."

"Oh! Mademoiselle, what can he do? She hates the Osbornes. She was as beautiful and as sweet as a May morning until the father came and made love to her in the garden—the place is bewitched, I believe—then went off and married another, and do you think she would mind the son much?"

"Would she mind Monsieur Lascours?" asked Adèle, willing to pacify Jeannette; "he promised to be my friend once. And he will not break his word."

"He promised that!" cried Jeannette, with sparkling eyes; "he really did promise it?"

"He really did."

"Then Mademoiselle is saved," said Jeannette, eagerly; "Monsieur Lascours is, perhaps, the only person who has a bit of influence with Mademoiselle. She likes him and she respects him. Oh! yes, yes, it is all right now."

Adèle smiled carelessly. Of course it was all right. She had made up her mind not to go—and go she would not; but she did not take the trouble of observing as much; she merely said:

"Yes, Jeannette, it is all right; but we must get hold of Monsieur Lascours, and at once too—for Cousine speaks of going before day."

"Jean shall take Monsieur Osborne's boat, and cross over in five minutes," said Jeannette, "and tell Monsieur Lascours that Mademoiselle wants him at once—at once."

She spoke with trembling eagerness, and went to the door, then came back.

"That will not do," she said; "Mademoiselle must write a letter."

"Oh! no," interrupted Adèle, looking alarmed; "I cannot write—I will not."

Jeannette went to the window and opened it. The night was still, the lake lay calm and quiet; a light burned in a dwelling across it. That light came from Monsieur Lascours's house. She closed the window, and turned round to Adèle.

"Would Mademoiselle be afraid to cross the lake in Monsieur Osborne's boat?" she asked gravely; "Jean is as safe a rower as there is in all the country; and if Mademoiselle tells her own tale to Monsieur Lascours, it will be best; and it will save time."

Adèle did not look pleased.

"I do not want to drop in there at night," she said, pouting; "I am not a bat."

"Ah: if I had thought that Mademoiselle would be afraid," deceitfully observed Jeannette, "I would not have spoken of such a thing."

"Afraid!" cried Adèle, starting to her feet; "afraid of crossing the quiet lake on a clear night! You know very well, Jeannette, I am not afraid. And since nothing else will please you—why, I will go. Only Monsieur Lascours will laugh at me."

"Monsieur Lascours will do no such a thing," gravely said Jeannette. "Monsieur Lascours, when he gave that promise to Mademoiselle, knew Mademoiselle de Janson, and guessed that she would try and play strange tricks some day."

Adèle was dressing. She turned round and asked: "What tricks?"

"Ah! Mademoiselle, the world is in a dreadful state," groaned Jeannette, "she will make you marry some rich, ugly, cross, old man, who has lost an eye or an arm."

"Or a leg," interrupted Adèle, laughing till the tears ran down her cheek. "Jeannette, I shall say 'no,' so loud, that the priest will drop his book aghast, and the bridegroom shall run away faster than he came."

"Ah! Mademoiselle, you are not going, and time passes."

"I am gone," said Adèle. She threw her mantle around her and lightly ran down the staircase.

CHAPTER XXII.

CONFESSIONS.

ADÈLE found Jean in Jeannette's room, seated in Jeannette's chair, and staring vacantly at Jeannette's wheel. He had not recovered the dismay with which he had heard Mademoiselle de Janson declare her intention of going away the next morning, or, rather, of taking her god-daughter with her. Adèle had some difficulty in making him understand what she wished him to do, and some trouble in convincing him that it was right or proper to do it.

"Oh, dear!" impatiently cried the young girl, "I do believe the world is going away, as Cousine says. Is it possible, Jean, you do not understand me?"

"Mademoiselle must excuse me," agitatedly began Jean, "but my poor head—"

"What, not gone yet!" cried Jeannette, who now entered the room. "Are you dreaming, Monsieur Jean? Get up, I say; my chair is not a boat, and my wheel is not Mademoiselle Adèle. Come, quick! yet stay; the night is chill; you had better put this around you."

And opening her wooden press, she took out a woollen cloak, striped white and black, and threw it on his back.

"Mademoiselle Jeannette is too good," murmured Jean, greatly touched with this proof of tenderness and care. He had risen as if by magic on hearing her sharp, abrupt voice, which, much better than the childish tones of Adèle, made him understand what he was to do, and that it was urgent that it should be done at once; but still somewhat confused and wild, as he would have said himself, he walked out of the room, and dropped Jeannette's cloak on the threshold.

"My new cloak!" murmured Jeannette. "Oh, what fools men are!" she added, turning up her eyes. "Well, well, one must have patience with them, poor things!—and he will catch his death of cold if I do not let him have it."—"The night is chill, and Jean is old, poor fellow! and the cloak will outlive us both," said Philosophy—"unless he drops it in the lake," added Prudence, closing the soliloquy; for Adèle had followed Jean out of the room, and Jeannette was walking at a distance after them in the broad alley.

But Prudence did not prevail; for when Jeannette, rather out

of breath, reached the stone steps at the bottom of which Jean was already unchaining Mr. Osborne's boat, she recklessly threw the cloak at him, and merely saying, sarcastically, "Do not drop it in the lake, if you can help it;" a recommendation against which Jean could not possibly protest, for the cloak alighting on his head, had fairly hoodwinked him. She turned to Adèle, who was laughing merrily, and pathetically exclaimed—

"Ah, Mademoiselle, do not laugh! do not laugh! You have cried sorely to-night, and now you are laughing; my heart mis-gives me that you will cry again."

"Perhaps I shall, and perhaps I shall not!" saucily replied Adèle; "but I know I shall not leave Courcelles. I will stay until Monsieur Osborne comes back, and I will ask him to let me be his little maid of all work, his little servant; and he will pay me my wages, and I shall be as happy as the day is long."

"The boat is ready," said Jean.

"Good-bye to you, Jeannette!" gaily cried Adèle.

She lightly sprang down the steps, and lightly entered the boat. With one stroke of the oars, Jean sent it off on the still lake.

"I hope Monsieur Jean will not forget about the cloak," said the voice of Jeannette.

"I will give you a velvet cloak, trimmed with fur, when I am a queen," replied Adèle from the water, "a real velvet cloak."

"A while ago, she was to be a servant—now a queen!" muttered Jeannette, turning away; "the little thing is mad!—the whole world is going mad, I believe!"

The lake was still as glass; the night had lulled into repose the moaning winds. It was a clear, serene night, without moon, but with a pale sky which a sort of light pervaded. There was a pleasant chillness in the air—pleasant, at least, to the warm, young blood of Adèle; it made her shiver, but she liked it. "Leave Courcelles," she thought, breathing it in with delight, "leave my little lake, my old garden, my mountains, and my little room—never! never!"

Adèle had not been reared in the home to which she clung so ardently, but she had come to it when she was still a child in years; her happiest days had been spent in its shelter; she had grown up to girlhood within view of mountain and lake, and she loved them both with the passion of a mountaineer.

"Leave Courcelles," she thought again, "never! never! Leave Courcelles, and not see Monsieur Osborne again? I will not—I cannot!"

"And how are we to get in?" asked the voice of Jean.

Adèle awoke from her reverie; the lake was crossed; the boat lay still at the foot of the steps that led to Monsieur Lascours's villa.

"Get in?" she gaily echoed, "why, by getting out first, of course."

She sprang out of the boat on the steps, ran them up, and was down an alley before Jean had recovered from his surprise.

A light burning through the trees guided Adèle to the house. It proceeded from the boudoir of Alice, and shone, with a warm glow, behind red silk curtains, on which Adèle, drawing near, saw the profile of only one figure; and something in its light and elegant lines told her at once that it belonged to her friend. "She is alone," she thought; "so much the better; I do not much like Monsieur Lascours's keen brown eye." But it was necessary to get in, and the house was securely closed. Adèle lightly tapped on the panes of the glass door. The figure within gave a start; she tapped again; the figure rose, advanced, and withdrew the silk curtain.

"Let me in!" softly said Adèle.

Madame Lascours dropped the curtain, and uttered a cry of alarm.

"I tell you I am not a ghost!" a little indignantly exclaimed the young girl, "let me in, Alice."

Madame Lascours recovered her self-possession on hearing the well-known girlish voice that did not seem indeed to belong to another world than this, and at once she opened the door to her little friend. Adèle stepped in, and dropping the silk curtain which she had raised to enter, she looked at the wondering face of Alice, and smiled.

"I am not wet this time," she said, gaily, "and I am not come to sleep in your bed."

Madame Lascours took her hand, led her to a chair by the fire, and looking at her with troubled attention, she said—

"Adèle, what has happened?"

"Nothing," shortly answered Adèle; "but I wish I were not amiable. It is a calamity to be too good, as I am. I have come here against my own will and judgment, to please Jeanette. And you receive me with a 'What has happened?' Monsieur Lascours will think me mad, of course. Is he in?"

"He is out," replied Alice, whose wonder had increased, "but he will soon be in," she added, looking at the handsome clock of the style called roccoco, which adorned the marble mantel-piece.

"Then I shall wait," coolly said Adèle; "I have business with Monsieur Lascours," she added, giving her friend a mischievous look. She had time to say no more; the door opened, and a quiet, middle-aged woman entered the apartment. She gave Adèle a slight, surprised bend of her calm head, then sat down by the fire, and took up a handkerchief which she was hemming. This lady Madame Lascours addressed as Madame Gérard, and Adèle remembered that Madame Gérard was one of the poor cousins of Alice, who had many; she remembered, too, that she lived in that dreary house by the lake, near which she had sat and rested on the day when she carried Mr. Osborne's letter.

Madame Gérard was a widow, a pious woman, and quietness was written in her whole aspect. Her extreme stillness silenced Adèle like a chill mist; she had a habit, too, of sighing now and then, that said without speech, "life is a folly, a dream;" and Adèle found a melancholy philosophy in Madame Gérard's very way of drawing her needle and thread. She spoke but once; Madame Lascours had mentioned the approaching marriage of Monsieur Lascours's niece. Madame Gérard sighed, and suspended her work for a moment.

"How can people marry?" she wondered; "life is so short."

"That is just why they do marry," put in Adèle; "they want to make it long by adding one life to another."

Madame Gérard gave her a calm, amazed look, and resumed her hemming. At ten this melancholy lady rose, bade Alice and Adèle good night, and retired.

Adèle shivered, and petulantly said—

"Oh, dear! your cousin has made me feel chill, Alice; but do you think Monsieur Lascours will come back to-night?"

"He certainly will, but he sometimes stays out late."

"Poor Jean is waiting in the boat. May I tell him to come into the house?"

She half rose, but the hand of Alice arrested her. She rang, a servant appeared, received a message concerning the welfare and comfort of Jean, and vanished.

"And now, child," said Madame Lascours, sitting down by Adèle, "do tell me what all this means."

"It means—it means," hesitatingly began Adèle, "that Cousine, convinced the world is going away, means to cheat the world by going away out of it first, and insists upon taking me with her to-morrow morning before dawn."

"Where to?" asked Madame Lascours, looking alarmed.

"Somewhere out of the world," gaily replied Adèle; "but do not look so grave, Alice. I am not going—not I—and I have told her so, too. But Jeannette having little faith in my powers of resistance, I suppose, could not be happy unless I came here to-night to ask Monsieur Lascours to interfere in my behalf. He has had the goodness to offer to be my friend, should I need him; and though I do not know how far he can help me, he will, I know, do his best."

"But what can Mademoiselle de Janson intend?" asked Alice, hesitatingly.

"Who knows?" carelessly replied the young girl; "you know she tells me nothing. I fancy she wants to go to some wild new world spot or other."

"Oh! no, it is not that," said Madame Lascours, looking sorely troubled; "it is worse, far worse for you."

"But since I am not going, Alice."

"Child, you will yield as others have yielded before you; yet if you can," she added with a low moan, "be taught by my sad example. Never marry a man whom you do not love."

Adèle gave a start; but she shook her head gaily.

"Ah! bah!" she said, "who would have a penniless girl like me?"

"You have what I had," said Alice, clasping her trembling hands, "youth and beauty, and these are woman's wealth. But, oh! be firm; do not yield; remember that marriage is the bliss of two or the torment of two. Never marry a man who loves you and whom you cannot love. You will be the punishment of his heart; he will be the sting of your conscience."

The eyes of Adèle sparkled with the generous confidence and pride of youth.

"If I had married a good man who loved me," she said, "I would love him with my whole heart, and defy Repentance or Regret."

Madame Lascours looked pained, and leaned her cheek on her hand.

"But why talk of all that?" said Adèle, calming down; "no one would have a worthless little thing like me. Cousine is not going to ask me to marry any one, for the world is going away; and as to making me marry against my will," she added, with a short, defiant laugh; "why who could do that?"

Alice smiled and sighed.

"You have a strong will," she said, "and a changeable temper. You cannot be compelled, but you may alter your mind, for you are fickle, Adèle."

Adèle reddened, and bit her lip.

"Fickle or not," she said, "I tell you that only tying me hand and foot shall make me stir out of Courcelles. Fickle or not, I tell you that I would not marry——"

She did not finish the protest. The door had opened, and Madame Gérard had entered the room with a strange perturbed meaning on her calm face.

CHAPTER XXIII.

REPENTANCE.

MADAME GÉRARD went up to Alice, and took her hand.

"My dear child," she said, "God loves you, for He has chastised you sorely."

Alice looked at her like one bewildered.

"What do you mean?" she asked. "What has happened? Nothing has happened to me. My husband is well—well and strong, and he will be back in a few moments."

"Poor thing! poor thing!" said Madame Gérard, gently stroking her hand; "poor thing! why did you marry? Life is short and perishable; the strong, the robust, are called away in their strength and without warning."

"I understand—my husband is dead," said Alice. Madame Gérard did not answer; Alice laid her head on the shoulder of Adèle, and seemed unable to weep, unable to speak, unable to feel.

At length she roused herself.

"Where is he?" she asked.

Madame Gérard took her hand, and led her out of the room into a neighbouring apartment, where Monsieur Lascours had been laid. He had dropped down dead in one of the streets of Nantua; a doctor was passing by and bled him at once, but uselessly. Other means were tried, and they proved as vain. At length he was borne inanimate and cold to that home which a few hours before he had left in all the strength of life, full of projects for a morrow he was never to behold. They had laid him on a low, long couch in his sitting-room; on a table near him burned a candle, that flared in the wind of the half-open door; its flickering

flame played changingly on the still, white hair, on the pallid brow, on the rigid features which the divine light of life, the spark of heaven, had deserted. Calm and placid as the face of a child looked the face which in life had worn a mien stern, spite its kindness; the scaled lid veiled the keen, brown eye, Adèle had half dreaded; a smile no longer sarcastic, but serenely sweet, rested on the pale lips. Alice sunk on her knees by her dead husband's side; she raised his cold hand to her lips, she cried with passionate sorrow, "Forgive me! forgive me, Henri!" Vain cry of a tardy repentance. What we do, we do for ever; a thought so awful, that the bravest heart dare not linger upon it, either when the deed is done, or when it is yet to do. Alice did not dare to call back, even with a thought, the seven years she had given to that unloved husband. She did not dare to dwell on the bitter confessions of that evening, the repining words of one who had suffered much, but words uttered when he against whom they were spoken had already by his death freed her from her bondage. She did not dwell upon them, she did not recall them, but they came back uncalled.

She dropped the hand which would never more offend hers by too fond a pressure; she rose like one distracted, she clasped her hands together, and she uttered broken and passionate exclamations, which Adèle, who stood by her side, alone overheard. "God forgive me! he bent over me to kiss me when he was going out; I turned my head away as if I had not seen him, and he turned away too—for he was proud—and that was our parting."

She bowed her head, and tears streamed down her cheek. Adèle passed her arm around the waist of Alice, and looked up at her with wistful eyes.

"Ah, but you loved him all the same," she said.

Alice shook her head and shaded her eyes with her hand. She had been married against her will, and she had never forgotten that wrong, she had never loved her husband. It had not been in her power. God alone rules the heart. Youth is severe, because it is ignorant. Adèle blamed her friend, and felt powerless to console her. She did not understand this tardy grief. Silently she withdrew from Alice. Madame Gérard came up to her, whispered something which Adèle did not hear, and finally led Madame Lascours out of the room. The door closed upon them; Adèle remained alone with the dead man. It was the first time that she found herself face to face with death. Yet no terror, no nervous dread, no shrinking, did she feel. She was young, but her heart was courageous, strong, and warm. She went up to

where he lay; she looked down at his calm, dead face, and she reproved Alice in her heart, and pitied him.

"You were a good old gentleman," she thought: "you were kind to me, and you meant to be my friend. I shall remember you night and morning in my prayers. The peace of God be with your soul, good old man. Ah! if I had been your wife, I would have forgiven you your years for your kindness and your love. Ah! I would have given you many a kiss, for all your white hairs."

Here the door opened, and Madame Gérard appeared on the threshold, and signed her to come out. Adèle obeyed. When they stood in the hall, Madame Gérard said, in a whisper, "Madame Lascours is in her boudoir, and wishes to see you."

Adèle did not reply, but at once entered the room which had heard the sad confessions of Alice. Madame Lascours sat by the table, her cheek on her hand; her tears had ceased, but deadly pallor had overspread her handsome face. Adèle went up to her, and bending over her, she asked how she felt.

"How I feel!" echoed Alice; "ah, child! child! never feel as I feel to-day. Never know sorrow, never know remorse. But that is not what I wish to say," she observed, breaking off. "Jean is waiting for you; it is near midnight, and this is no place for you. Go; you need not wait any longer for your friend to plead your cause; your friend is before his Judge now, and may the weak woman whom he married, and whose weakness embittered his existence, may she obtain some day as meritorious a hearing as will surely be granted to him. But what am I saying?—God help me! I seem to have but one thought. My meaning was this—entreat your cousin, if not for your sake, yet for the sake of the dead, entreat her to delay her departure a few days. Leave the rest to me."

She pressed her hand to her forehead, like one unable to say more. Adèle did not answer; she stooped, and gently kissing the cheek of her friend, she said—

"Good-bye, Alice—God comfort you."

And she walked out as she had entered, by the glass door that opened on the garden.

"Ah, Mademoiselle! Mademoiselle, how dreadful!" exclaimed Jean, as his young mistress entered the boat. "He was a good old gentleman, though he threatened me once with his cane."

Adèle did not answer; the boat gliding away on the still dark lake, seemed to bear her to another life. Everywhere around her

death seemed to say—"Life is short, life is a dream, life is passing away."

Vulgar minds are pitiless.

"Madame Lascours will be a rich woman now," said Jean, resting as they reached the middle of the lake; "and this time she will marry to please herself, and not her mother."

Adèle remained mute with indignation. The poor old man was not yet in his grave; and already the world, under the shape and voice of Jean, speculated about the future possessor of his wife and inheritance.

"Poor lady!" continued Jean, compassionately, "she cannot have been very happy; he was a good gentleman, but too old; besides, she was fond of another before she married him. I dare say they will marry now," he added, after a pause. "Ah, well, the world is a rolling wheel, as Mademoiselle Jeannette—Holy Virgin, I have lost her cloak, after all!"

And the incidents of the evening, the death of Monsieur Lascours, and the probable marriage of his widow, were forgotten by Jean in this calamity.

"Poor old man!" thought Adèle, "poor old man! he is not dead an hour, and it is all over."

She raised her dewy eyes, and looked at the night sky; faint stars burned there, silent and eternal. "Everything is perishable; everything passes away," she thought. "Ah, Madame Gérard was right—life is short. Let us live well then, let us live well."

"We are at home," said Jean.

No longer with a light or springing step Adèle left the boat, and went up the stone steps. In the alley she met Jeannette. Without giving her time to speak, she said—

"Jeannette, where is Cousine?"

"Madame is talking to herself about the going away of the world in the Hall;" sharply replied Jeannette; "and as the world is going away, she does not think it necessary to go to bed. But where is Monsieur Lascours?"

"Ah, Jeannette, it is sad, very sad; Jean will tell you all."

And leaving Jeannette in the middle of the path, she went on, crossed the court, entered the house, and without giving herself time to think or to pause, she opened the door of the old Hall, where Mademoiselle de Janson sat in her chair, her hands folded, her eyes closed, her lips still murmuring incoherent laments about life and the world. She heard Adèle enter, but she neither moved nor opened her eyes; and it was only when

the young girl said, in a low, sad voice, "I should like to speak to you, Cousine," that Mademoiselle de Janson opened her blue eyes with a start. Adèle stood on the hearth before her, no longer the rebellious girl, but pale, grave, and sad. "Cousine," she said again, "I should like to speak to you."

"Speak!" majestically said Mademoiselle de Janson.

"I was very naughty this evening," said Adèle; "I am sorry for it."

"I forgive you," said her godmother.

Adèle pursued.

"You have reared me; I have eaten your bread; slept under your roof; worn the clothes you gave me. I might be a beggar but for you. Forgive me if I was so ungrateful as to forget it."

"I have already forgiven you," said her godmother, with slight impatience; "you are but a child."

Adèle pressed her hands to her heaving bosom with more than childlike passion; and there passed on her young face a more than childlike meaning.

"Even though it should break my heart," she exclaimed, "I will obey you."

"Right—quite right," murmured Mademoiselle de Janson, shutting her eyes again, and not seeming either surprised or elated at this sudden obedience. "Go to bed, child," she added, "go to bed."

"Cousine, I wish to say something more to you," urged Adèle.

Mademoiselle de Janson looked impatient, but she opened her eyes again.

Pale, but firm, Adèle slightly raised her right hand, thus involuntarily and unconsciously commanding attention.

"Cousine," she said, with some solemnity, "I will obey you like a little child, so long as you command nothing against my conscience and my honour."

Mademoiselle de Janson's lips parted with amazement, but not a word passed them.

"I do not know what you intend," pursued Adèle, "but do not ask me to marry a man whom I do not like; it is against my honour to sell myself; against my conscience to deceive."

Mademoiselle de Janson shut her eyes, and murmured audibly:

"The little thing is mad; we must put her in a lunatic asylum. She is mad, you know."

Adèle felt very much vexed. Mademoiselle de Janson con-

descended to open her eyes, and to speak for once like a person in her senses.

"Child," she said, "I pity you; you are labouring under extraordinary delusions. I cannot possibly be angry with you. I do not, indeed, mind explaining my intentions to you; that will perhaps help to dispel the fog that evidently obscures your intellect. I leave Courcelles because I cannot help it, because matter-of-fact changes in my worldly position compel me to part with it; mine it is no more; it belongs to Monsieur Osborne now; I have sold it, and he has bought it."

Tears rushed to the eyes of Adèle.

"May he enjoy it long," she said.

"Amen!" ironically put in her godmother; "but in the meanwhile we must not stay here—we have no business here."

The heart of Adèle swelled, but she internally granted the justice of this assertion.

"Accordingly," pursued her godmother, "we shall withdraw to a quiet retreat, where we shall lead a quiet life, such as becomes two reduced gentlewomen. What you mean by not asking you to do anything against your conscience, surpasses my poor brains. But your declaration that it is against your honour to marry a man whom you do not like, pains and shocks me. It shows me that marriage has been running in your head all this time."

"Oh, Cousine," cried Adèle, red as fire, "how can you say that? On my word—on my word of honour," she added, with tears of shame and pride, "I do not wish to marry; I do not think of marriage. On my word, Cousine, on my word."

"Well, I suppose I must believe you," said Mademoiselle de Janson, seeming impressed with her earnestness; "Adèle de Courcelles cannot give her word four times to an untruth. I congratulate you on that celibate frame of mind; for marriage is not merely an evil, and the pest of society, but it is positively out of the question for you; you are too poor ever to get a husband, though you should long for one."

"But I do not long for a husband, Cousine; I do not want to marry at all!" cried Adèle, whose face glowed again. "I wish I had bit my tongue before I said a word about it. Oh, *mon Dieu*, why will you not believe me?"

"I do believe you," gravely said Mademoiselle de Janson; "and let this discourse end. It is late; go up to your room—your wardrobe is all packed, of course—and be up early. We leave before day."

The heart of Adèle sank within her. Without a word, she turned away, and left the room. Alas! it had come back to the beginning, and the rebellious girl, who had protested that unless she were tied hand and foot, she would never leave Courcelles, had yielded.

CHAPTER XXIV.

FAREWELL.

ON the staircase Adèle met Jeannette, who was waiting for her. The young girl merely said :

"I am going away to morrow-morning, Jeannette, will you pack up my things?"

"Mademoiselle has consented?" said Jeannette, faintly.

"Yes, Jeannette, I have."

She said no more, but ran up the staircase like one who would conquer thought. Jeannette, bewildered at the news Jean had brought, at the death of Monsieur Lascours, and the loss of her cloak, at the suddenness of this leaving and parting, found not a word to say, but followed Adèle upstairs. A little trunk fetched from the lumber-room was more than sufficient to pack all the young girl possessed. With many a groan, Jeannette went through her task; but at length it was over, and looking round the room, she said :

"There is nothing more. Will not Mademoiselle go to bed?"

Adèle was lying dressed on her bed, with her eyes closed, and her hands folded. She did not raise her head, but replied, in a low, subdued voice :

"It is not worth while, Jeannette. It will soon be day. Kiss me, and go and rest a while."

Weeping, Jeannette laid her lips on the fair young face of her mistress, and muttering to herself, "God forgive her, I cannot!" she left the room.

Adèle could not sleep. She seemed steeped in grief. To leave Courcelles, and never return to it; to bid adieu to Jeannette; to see Mr. Osborne no more,—seemed to her like the division of her soul from her body. And yet it must be. The sad scenes she had witnessed that evening had told her that there

is something in life besides the indulgence of youth's passionate will; that there is duty, and that duty violated leaves a ceaseless sting behind. They had told her, too, that life is brief, and that it is better to live well than to live happily. As Jean rowed her across the lake her resolve was taken. "I will submit," she had thought; "I will obey the woman to whom I owe everything in this world. I will obey her freely without restriction. Poor Alice means well, but she could do nothing. Cousine might have minded her husband, she would not mind her. I will go—Life is short, they say. Oh! why is it so sweet? I will see him, my good, kind friend, no more! and he will forget me! 'What! is she really gone?' he will say, when he comes back, and he will kiss his little girl, and think no more about me. God bless him for all his kindness—even though he should not think of me an hour. Never shall I forget him—never."

Youth is heroic. It forms noble resolves, and finds a certain joy in great sacrifices. But it is not dispensed from feeling their bitterness. And though Adèle could not repent a decision which conscience had dictated, and which necessity and pride, after what her godmother had told her, confirmed and rendered imperative, still as she lay on her bed, as she felt the time passing, and the coming of the hour that was to sunder her from all she loved, she shook from head to foot, and her very heart felt riven in twain with a passionate sorrow. A faint streak of light shone athwart the sky. She sat up on her bed and looked at it, and for once she did not welcome the dawning day.

"I must bid Lilian farewell," she thought; "I must give her one kiss before I go."

She rose and left the room. Lilian and her *bonne* occupied two rooms on the same floor with that of Adèle. Their doors were never locked. Softly the young girl opened that of Mr. Osborne's child, and entered it. A night-lamp burned on a table, and shed a dim glow in the large apartment. Through the open door of the next room Adèle heard the regular breathing of the *bonne*: she was fast asleep. Lilian, too, was sleeping soundly in her little white bed. On a chair at its foot her clothes lay neatly folded, and on the table where the lamp stood lay in a tray Lilian's two bijoux, as she called them: the little brooch Adèle had given her; a little locket that held some of Mr. Osborne's hair.

The courage of Adèle forsook her quite. She sat down on a chair and cried. Then she rose and took up the locket and kissed it with strange passion. Then she put it away where

she had found it, and cried again, and saw Lilian's large black eyes looking at her solemnly.

"What are you crying for?" she asked, gravely.

Adèle bent over her and kissed her cheek.

"I am going away Lilian," she said softly; "you will never see me again. Never—never."

And her tears fell like rain on the child's face.

"But why are you going?" asked Lilian.

"Because I must."

"Stay."

"Stay? Oh! that I could—but I cannot. Happy Lilian! you will stay here for ever with Monsieur Osborne; you will be the little mistress of Courcelles. May you be very happy here, Lilian, as happy as I have been. May every spot of the house, every nook of the garden, be as pleasant to you as they have been to me—and may you never, like me, Lilian, have to bid home and friends good-bye!"

Her voice broke in sobs; but Lilian seemed more surprised than grieved.

"But why do you go?" she asked again.

"Because I must. Oh! Lilian, tell him, tell Monsieur Osborne I mean, that I liked him very much, that I know how kind he has been to me, that I am very sorry to go without bidding him good-bye. Tell him that I know about the ivory-case and the books, and the play, and that I hope God will always bless him, and that he will give back to his little girl all the kindness he gave to a friendless girl, like me. Do you think you can remember that, Lilian?"

"No," frankly said Lilian, "there is too much of it; tell him yourself."

"I shall be gone—gone—when he comes back. I shall never—never see him again, never!" cried Adèle, with passionate lament.

"I wish you would not cry," said Lilian, looking moved; but Adèle, laying her head on the child's pillow, only cried the more bitterly.

"Happy little girl!" she said, "you will be loved and caressed, as I saw you that morning in the garden, and I shall be gone—and who will think of me? The garden will forget me—the orchard will not remember that I have laid down in the grass and sung and slept there; and when old Jeannette is dead or gone, nothing and no one will think of Adèle in Courcelles. Happy little girl! I shall pray for you, and since you cannot

remember all I said, remember at least this: tell your father that the little girl, to whom he was so kind, loved him very much."

"I wish you would not go," said Lilian; "pray do not. I like you. Stay."

"I cannot. Good night. Good-bye! Tell him what I told you. Good-bye."

She kissed her again and again, then started up and ran away crying. But she did not enter her room. "I will see my old garden again," she thought; "I will bid my old orchard good-bye."

She lightly glided down the staircase, where the breaking light of dawning day struggled with the dying glow of the lamp; she softly passed by the door of the old Hall, where she heard Mademoiselle de Janson still talking to herself, and she thought to step out noiselessly into the court; but the door that led to it was locked, and the key was not in the lock. Adèle stood a moment irresolute, then suddenly she remembered Mr. Osborne's rooms that opened on the garden. She went to them at once, and found them open and free. The shutters had not even been closed, and the pale light of a pale sky pervaded them. But all wish of going to the garden forsook Adèle as she looked around her. She remembered his goodness, his kindness, the happy moments she had spent in that house with him. She sat down, and like a child she cried again.

Her heart was very full; her head was heavy with want of sleep; her eyes were swollen with weeping. The sense of fatigue which follows grief in youth came over her. She leaned her cheek upon her hand in a sort of stupor; gradually thought became a dream; visible objects ceased to be distinct; her eyes closed from very weariness, her head sank back,—she slept heavily and soundly.

Very soundly she slept. She did not hear the loud knocking at the outer door, which at once restored all her lost energy to Jeannette, and made her exclaim, as she started to her feet:

"Monsieur is come. Ah! we shall see now."

In a moment, she had opened the door and admitted her master. He had come, not on the back of Joli, but in one of the light conveyances of the country. He alighted, dismissed the driver, and entered without a word.

"I thought it was the carriage that is to take away Madame and Mademoiselle," said Jeannette.

No surprise, no annoyance, expressed themselves on Mr Osborne's face. He looked tired, and no more.

"Tell me when Mademoiselle Adèle is up," he said.

"Mademoiselle has not gone to bed. I think she is in Mademoiselle Lilian's room."

Mr. Osborne threw his cloak on the head of the bannisters, and walked upstairs. The hopes of Jeannette revived faintly.

Mr. Osborne did not find Adèle in Lilian's room. It was silent; the night-lamp burned dimly, and Lilian lay awake in her bed. Her father kissed her fondly.

"What have you been crying about?" he asked, feeling her cheek and her pillow still wet.

"I have not been crying," solemnly replied Lilian; "but the little girl has; do not let her go away."

"Do you like her?" he asked, smiling.

"Much—very much."

He smoothed Lilian's hair, and kissed her again.

"The little girl told me to tell you something, but I have forgotten it."

"She will tell it to me herself," he said, turning away.

"Please," said Lilian, "will you see if my locket is in the tray. I think the little girl has taken it away."

"Lilian, what could make you think that?" asked her father, displeased; "your locket is there."

"She wanted to take it away," said Lilian, positively; "she kissed it, and she cried, and she would have taken it away if I had not been looking at her."

"You dreamt that, Lilian," said Mr. Osborne, very coolly. He walked downstairs, and found Jeannette standing perturbed at the door of his rooms. She had just detected Adèle asleep there, and still sleeping fast. Stammering, she begged her master not to enter. A look rapidly cast within the room told him what had happened. He smiled, and said "Poor child!" and forbade Jeannette to waken her.

"Close the door," he said, turning away, "and ask Mademoiselle de Janson if I can speak to her."

"Yes, yes," eagerly said Jeannette, "at once, Monsieur, at once."

And, without warning or announcement, she ushered him into the Hall, where Mademoiselle de Janson sat.

With a start, she saw him; with a cold, ungracious face she welcomed him. Her whole manner, as she sank back in her chair, said plainly: "I will not yield." As plainly his look declared, as he sat down, "I am resolved."

CHAPTER XXV.

WHAT MR. OSBORNE HAD TO SAY.

THERE was a brief silence, during which they gave one another a mistrustful look.

"This is an unexpected pleasure," at length said Mademoiselle de Janson.

"Are you sure it is unexpected?" he asked, with a smile, in which habitual courtesy tempered natural irony.

But without replying, she drew herself up haughtily, and her whole air implied: "I beg that you will speak."

"I am fortunate in having arrived in time," he pursued; "I understand that you were to be gone by this. To say the truth, when I called upon you in Lyons, and found that you had forgotten our appointment, I had a presentiment, that, unless I made some haste, I should scarcely find you here. I have travelled night and day, I may say," he added, with a provoking smile, which did not seem to put Mademoiselle de Janson in a very good humour, and brought a froward look to her fair face. She moved restlessly in her chair, and at length she exclaimed, half angrily,—

"And what is it to you what I do with this young girl? What right have you to interfere between her and me?"

His face darkened visibly.

"I have wronged her," he said.

"Why not say *we* have wronged her?" she haughtily asked.

"Your politeness may spare itself the trouble of using the singular."

"Well, let it be that; we have wronged her—you through imprudence, and I through the folly I committed in trusting my own brother. The wrong you have done her but strengthens my wish to repair my error."

"You cannot," she said.

Mr. Osborne bit his lip, and rose and walked about the room. Mademoiselle de Janson followed him with an ironical look, as if she enjoyed his perplexity; yet perplexed he was not in the least; he was simply thinking.

Mademoiselle de Janson had—as we have already said—and as every one who was acquainted with her knew—plenty of peculiarities,—a habit of useless mysteries ranked amongst them. In one of the early chapters of this tale, we have mentioned that

on parting from Mr. Osborne on the evening of his arrival, she had addressed to him, with regard to Adèle, a warning of secrecy, which he had not then understood, nor, indeed, much heeded. It was only later, on becoming acquainted with some of the intricacies of his father's affairs, that the meaning of Mademoiselle de Janson's warning was revealed to him.

Mademoiselle de Janson and Adèle were richer than the elder lady chose to say, or than the younger one imagined. They were the joint possessors of a fortune, which, without being splendid, was handsome. They had not had it long, and how it had come to them was more than Mr. Osborne ever knew. Mademoiselle de Janson, whose memory was short, had given him three different versions on the subject, when they discussed those matters in Lyons. A vast inheritance of West Indian sugar was her first account; shares in the Russian mines.—“What mines?” asked Mr. Osborne.—“Very good mines,” was the mysterious reply—came next; lastly, and thirdly, Mademoiselle de Janson informed him that she had had an uncle, who had died, as such uncles die, and left Adèle and her his entire wealth.

Now, it so happened that nature had not given this inventive lady an uncle, and that Mr. Osborne knew it. The West Indian sugar—the Russian mines—left him sceptical. He could not ascertain the exact truth; but it was very likely that his conjectures touched close upon it. Mademoiselle de Janson had inherited the paternal propensities. She was a gambler at heart. The world might be going away, and no doubt was, but in the meanwhile she flirted with Mammon. Spite the grievous wrong she had sustained at his hands, she kept up a close and active correspondence with the late Mr. Osborne. They speculated together, and against each other, for years, until his death severed this singular alliance. Had some lucky hit suddenly enriched the two ladies? had slow but sure speculation increased to its present size their originally meagre pittance? Mr. Osborne did not trouble himself with the useless question, which Monsieur Morel alone could have answered satisfactorily; but it troubled him, and sorely, to find that the fate and future of two women, one of whom knew nothing, and was but a child, and the other of whom was fitful, capricious, and all but crazy, lay in his hands. Had it been in his power he would at once have relinquished so unwelcome a responsibility, but it was not; Ixion was tied to his wheel, and had but to go on.

How Robert managed to dispose of the fortune of Adèle and her godmother, is a matter which we may allude to, but need not

dwell upon. He did it, he half ruined his brother, and with him Mademoiselle de Janson, and Adèle with her. The news filled Mr. Osborne with shame and grief, and a strange fact deepened both feelings: the letter which Adèle had taken and carried had hastened the catastrophe; her own hand, innocent and unconscious, had sealed her own ruin. At once his resolve was taken, and he went to Lyons to impart that resolve to Mademoiselle de Janson, and lay before her the sad and bitter story of his trust abused by his own brother, and of her ruin achieved by the son of her wronger. Mademoiselle de Janson received the news very coolly, said she was not surprised, that the world was going away, begged that Mr. Osborne would oblige her so far as to rid her of Courcelles by purchasing it, and finally deferred hearing any more until he should return from England, where business compelled him to go at once. They had another interview on his return, but Mademoiselle de Janson felt so hot, and her head ached so badly, that she could not attend to business. She would hear all that Mr. Osborne had to say to her about Adèle on the next day, at a quarter past three. And when Mr. Osborne called upon her the next day at a quarter past three, he learned, without much surprise, that Mademoiselle de Janson was gone. He followed her at once, and, thanks to that reverie which overtook the lady when she ought to have been ordering the horses to be put to the carriage, and the luggage to be securely strapped, Mr. Osborne had arrived before her intended departure could take place.

What had happened since his arrival we know, and how Mademoiselle de Janson's last remark, defying him to repair the wrong of which he was partly the cause, had made Mr. Osborne bite his lip, and rising, pace the room in anxious thought.

Repair it, in the sense of restitution, he could not. The wrong was done, and must stay. He knew it but too well; and without attempting to deny the truth of Mademoiselle de Janson's assertion, he sat down again, and said,—

"May I ask what is to become of the poor child? I understand that you mean to take her away."

His look, though not his tongue, added, "Where to?" but Mademoiselle de Janson did not choose to reply.

"Yes," she said, loftily, "I am going away, and she comes with me, of course. I have not yet made up my mind as to where we are going,—east, west, south, or north. I dare say I shall find it out."

"My object in asking to speak to you in Lyons," said Mr.

Osborne, "was to propose another plan, so far, at least, as Mademoiselle de Courcelles is concerned."

"Monsieur Osborne," said Mademoiselle de Janson, coldly, and speaking in a practical tone, which she could assume when she chose, "I guessed your meaning in Lyons, and I tell you I do not like it. I will not leave my god-daughter and cousin to your care and guardianship. She shall not be the governess and the plaything of your child—the amusement of your idle hours. You cannot give her back her lost fortune. I do not blame you—you know I do not; but to offer Adèle a home here is no better than a piece of unconscious impertinence. Your interference is altogether impertinent, and I resent it. Your own family gives you, or ought to give you, plenty to think of—leave me what remains of mine. Young though she is," added Mademoiselle de Janson, after a brief pause, "her place is not here as your guest. A man of thirty is not an old man."

"I hope not," he said, smiling.

"And a girl of seventeen is not a child."

"True."

"And you would not be six months in the house together without falling in love."

"Excuse me," said Mr. Osborne, "but you labour under a great misunderstanding. I admire Mademoiselle Adèle; I think her original, witty, delightful, but she has everything to learn. She cannot be a governess."

"Then in what capacity you expect my cousin and god-daughter to remain here is more than I can imagine," said Mademoiselle de Janson, with great asperity.

"As my wife, of course," he calmly replied.

She gave a start, and stared at him.

"Impossible!" she cried; "impossible!"

"And why impossible?" he asked.

"You are too old for her—she is a mere child."

"You have just informed me that a man of thirty is not an old man; that a girl of seventeen is not a child; and that we could not be six months in the same house without falling in love."

"I tell you it is impossible," she said again; "Adèle would not have you."

"We can ask her."

"Are you in love with her?"

"In love," he said, coldly; "in love, oh, no, Mademoiselle de Janson, I am not in love, nor do I wish to be."

"Then you have no business to marry her."

Mr. Osborne reddened.

"I declare," he said, with some passion, "that if I were in love with that young girl, nothing earthly, neither honour nor duty, no, nothing, should induce me to marry her. For if I loved her, in the sense you attach to that word, I should say her beauty is not what I see it—it is deformity. Her innocence hides a secret canker; there is gall under the seeming sweetness of that sunny temper. Ah, you forget," he added more calmly, "that I have married for love, that I have tasted that delightful delusion, that I know the shame of that wakening. Marry again for love! truly, I should be mad!"

"You speak like a man!" indignantly exclaimed Mademoiselle de Janson. "You wrong love, because you know nothing about it."

"And you wrong human nature," he calmly replied, "because, like a woman, you will not see it save under one exclusive aspect. What! shall not the affection, the esteem, of a man of honour—of a good and innocent girl—make as happy a marriage as the blind passion of a madman, and the fond folly of a foolish woman? Do not say so—pray, do not say so."

"So thought your father, I suppose!"

Mr. Osborne sighed.

"Do not let us recall that," he entreated. "You were cruelly wronged; and, believe me, I always felt it; but let the past rest; we are in the present. Give me Adèle," he added, with his most persuasive smile.

"You do not care about her?"

"Indeed I do; I am very fond of her."

He spoke sharply, and seemed hurt with the imputation of indifference.

"Is it possible," he added, with some impatience, "that you do not understand me? No, I do not love her according to your meaning of that word, but I wish to marry her, and to make her as happy as I can. I wish to be happy with her too. No, I might not have thought of marriage, if Robert had not robbed her. But if I were not fond of her, if I did not feel that I could be fonder of her still, and make her fond of me, I would not add to the wrong she has already suffered a wrong far deeper. I would not give her a cold and careless husband. As for myself," he continued, with some haughtiness, "I would undergo any fate rather than endure the humiliation of marrying a girl whom I did not like. But truly, I need not say what I would

not do; if I did not like her, if she did not please me, I could not marry her; my powers of self-subjection would not reach that heroic point."

He spoke with an undiagnosed scorn that repelled the imputation for ever.

Mademoiselle de Janson gave him an ironical look, and ironically she said—

"So you feel—what will Adèle say?—of course you are confident of success?"

"I? I know nothing about it!"

Any personal vanity was so foreign to him, that his denial was as simply uttered as it was worded. It was the truth; he knew nothing about it. Adèle was very fond of him indeed; but would she feel inclined to marry him? He could not tell; he only knew what he wished; her feelings, her desires, he could not guess.

"There never was so conceited a creature as a man," said Mademoiselle de Janson; "you are one of the modest ones, yet you think you have only to speak to get a pretty girl of sixteen, who is of good birth, does not care a rush for money, and has life before her. Do you think yourself so very fascinating?" she asked.

But Mr. Osborne was not disconcerted by so delicate an enquiry.

"Let Mademoiselle de Courcelles answer the question," he coolly replied.

"The world is going away," murmured Mademoiselle de Janson.

She had time to say no more. The door opened, and Adèle broke in, breathless with joy.

"You come wonderfully *apropos*," ironically observed her godmother; "excuse me," she added, addressing Mr. Osborne, who gave a start, and looked deprecating, "I have a fancy for going to the bottom of this."

"Very well," he said, a little impatiently, "very well;" and rising, he walked away to the window.

"Monsieur Osborne," pursued Mademoiselle de Janson, addressing Adèle, "is, as you know, a widower; he wishes to marry again, and he wishes to marry you—you know my opinion of marriage—but I shall not interfere; if you consent, I do; please yourself."

The arms of Adèle dropped by her side; she turned pale as death. It seemed to her that the world was passing away, and

that she was passing away with it. The floor distinctly shook under her, and over her eyes there fell a mist, in which the face of Mr. Osborne, who stood looking at her with grave attention, was floating. But she quickly recovered; and a look at her god-mother and at Mr. Osborne, between whom she stood, told her that she had not been dreaming—that she had imagined nothing.

"Choose," impatiently said Mademoiselle de Janson.

The heart of Adèle beat very fast, She looked up at Mr. Osborne; he, too, looked at her.

Love had nothing to do, as we know, with his offer; but has man's heart no strong feeling save love? Are not will and the wish to possess blended with his very being? For a month Mr. Osborne had resolved to marry Adèle if she would have him; and that resolve had not left him indifferent to its accomplishment. With all the force of his will, he now wished to prevail and win the young girl who stood before him with hesitation trembling on her parted lips, with shall I, or shall I not? written in her whole aspect. But her doubt did not last; her eyes sank; she averted his face from her gaze, and turned away. His look fell.

"You refuse!" he said, with some emotion: and he, too, turned away; but in a moment she was by his side, and her hand, lightly laid on his arm, arrested him. He turned round, flashed with pleasure—and why deny it?—with a man's triumph and pride too; for though she had not spoken, her burning face implied consent.

"After that!" said Mademoiselle de Janson, rising in great indignation, "I shall know what to think of deceitful little things who do not want to marry."

"Oh, Cousine!" cried Adèle.

"Did you, or did you not, give me your word four times this evening that you did not wish to marry?" pursued her god-mother.

Adèle looked as if only the strongest self-control could prevent her from crying.

"I leave you to your conscience," sternly and loftily resumed Mademoiselle de Janson.

She left the room as she spoke, and Adèle, still bewildered at this strange, rapid scene, remained alone with her future husband. Her heart beat very fast; her head swam; she felt faint, and turned pale. He smiled, and gently took her hand, but she drew it away like one frightened.

"Has this been too sudden?" he quickly asked; "do you repent?"

"No, no!" she cried, with some warmth. "I repent nothing; I am glad, I am happy to stay here for ever with you; but I did not know you were so fond of me."

She looked up in his face with a half-sad wonder that moved his very heart.

"I will make you the happiest little lady there ever has been in Courcelles," he said, very kindly.

"I am—I am—" she exclaimed, in broken, ungrammatical, childish speech; but she hid her face behind her hands;—"I am not crying," she said from behind them, "I am not."

But when he gently moved them, he saw her cheeks covered with tears.

"Well, then, I ought not to be crying," she said, petulantly, "but it is all your fault. Why do you take me when I am full of grief at the thought of going away, and never seeing you, and make me so happy? Why are you good? why are you fond of me? I will not hear any more. Good-bye to you—good night! and good morning!"

She laughingly withdrew her hands from his, started away, and, with her usual rapidity, she was gone before he could arrest her.

With a smile he heard her running up the staircase. If he had felt a doubt, a fear, they vanished after this. How could happiness fail coming to him with youth, beauty, and innocence; with a temper so delightful, a soul so frank, and a heart so free?

Adèle ran up the staircase with joyous haste. She met Jeannette, who was coming down, and she threw her arms around Jeannette's neck, as Jeannette's young master had once done.

"Wish me joy," she said, her face radiant with smiles; "I am to be Monsieur Osborne's wife, and to live here for ever with him. Wish me joy, Jeannette."

And leaving Jeannette more ready to drop with dismay than to wish her little mistress joy, Adèle ran up to her room, and lying down on her bed, she clasped her hands above her head, and smiled with the wondering joy of a child who has read a fairy tale, and finds it true.

CHAPTER XXVI.

COURTSHIP.

"*THAT* is absurd, you know, quite absurd."

Adèle hung her head, and looked passively obstinate.

"I tell you it is absurd," persisted Mademoiselle de Janson; "marry at your age! Take your doll, child, take your doll, and play."

Impossible to describe the loftiness, the superciliousness with which the lady spoke. Yet all Adèle answered was:

"Cousine, why did you consent last night? Your word is passed and so is mine, and we cannot break our word."

"Indeed! Pray did you keep your word?"

Adèle reddened, but justified herself simply:

"I did not know I should like to marry Monsieur Osborne, until he asked me. I had never thought about it."

Mademoiselle de Janson turned up her eyes; but as she said no more, Adèle, after standing awhile in the arbour, where this discourse had taken place, quietly walked away, and pursued the early promenade, which her godmother had interrupted.

She went to the orchard; she wanted to say her prayers there, to thank God, to be happy and good; but scarcely had she passed the trellised boundary, scarcely had she sprung through the dewy grass that lay heavy and white in the solitary enclosure, when a doleful voice behind her observed:

"Mademoiselle is out early this morning."

It was Jeannette who spoke.

Adèle turned round with some ennui. "She, too, is going to preach," she thought impatiently; but she was sufficiently confident of her power of resistance not to care much in the main.

"I have been forty years in the family," began Jeannette, then suddenly breaking off: "Oh! Mademoiselle," she exclaimed, "do you know what you are doing?"

"Do I know what I am doing?" echoed Adèle, shortly; "much obliged to you, Jeannette, for the question."

She made a dart to run away, but Jeannette's outstretched hand caught her skirt and held her back.

"Mademoiselle! my dear little mistress," she said, beseechingly, "have you thought well about this? You are going to marry a man double your age, to become the mother of another woman's child, and yourself but a child."

"Thank you!" indignantly said Adèle, and loosening her dress from Jeannette's relaxed grasp, she coldly walked away.

"I suppose it must be," thought Jeannette, who was something of a predestinarian, and had a hopeless way of looking at things fixed beyond her control.

"They are very tiresome," thought Adèle; "first, Cousine, who bids me say yes or no last night, and who, when I have said yes, wants me to say no this morning; then Jeannette, who way-lays me to tell me that Monsieur Osborne is double my age, and has a little girl. I wish he were here."

He stood before her, looking at her attentively; but she did not see him; she walked on until arrested by his figure; she then started back and looked up.

They exchanged no spoken greeting; but he looked down at her kindly, and with childlike pleasure she looked up in his face and smiled.

He took her hand, passed her arm within his, led her a few steps away, made her sit down on an old broken stone bench beneath a tall fruit tree, and sitting down by her side, he said:

"Adèle, I have just left Mademoiselle de Janson. She says that you regret being pledged to me; that you want to be free; is it true?"

"No," bluntly replied Adèle.

"Well, I did not think it was. Mademoiselle de Janson imagines many things, as I know of old; but she has been making some objections to me, which have great weight. She has taxed me with taking an ungenerous advantage of your inexperience. God forbid that I should. It would be sad for us both, if you should repent when it is too late."

"But how could I repent?" she asked, warmly.

"Look at me," he said, "not so—look me full in the face."

She obeyed with some wonder. He pushed away the hair from his forehead.

"I am thirty," he said, "and you are not seventeen."

"What matter?" she replied; "you are quite a young man."

"But I shall be old when you still are young."

Adèle smiled at so much foresight. The argument moved her so little that she did not reply.

"That is not all," he persisted; "years and experience have given me a certain calmness of manner which you may, when we are married, mistake for coldness of feeling. It would be sad, very sad, indeed, Adèle, if you should fancy that I did not love you enough."

There was nothing like indifference in his look as he said this.

"Why should I think that?" asked Adèle, simply, "since it is not true."

"Because, though not true, it might look like it. You know that I have been married—you do not know that my married life, short but wretched, has made me older than I am by twenty years."

"You were not happy?"

"Happy!" he echoed; "my little Adèle, never say the word in connection with that time."

"Did you not like her?"

"I! I married her for love."

"Then what was it?"

Mr. Osborne smiled bitterly.

"She married me for money, or, rather—why wrong her, poor thing?—for a position and a home. She hated me, and could not forgive me being her husband, and I found it hard to forgive her for having deceived me. But why do I bring all this up to you? God forbid that my past should be our future. All I mean to say is this; you are young, and youth is exacting. Do you think that you can take me as I am—a man of thirty, truly fond of you in his heart, but not showing it quite so much, perhaps, as if he were ten years younger?"

Adèle gave him a grave, attentive look, like one who found it hard to understand his meaning.

"Why not?" she said at length, calmly and simply; "am I so foolish or so unreasonable as to fret about the manner, when I have the substance? You like me and you esteem me, or you would not wish to marry me and give me your little girl. What can I wish for more?"

Her look sought his, and rested on his face with a calm serenity that moved him.

"The trust you have in me I repose in you," he said; "I know that if you did not like and esteem me, you would not marry me."

He spoke very quietly, yet the hand of Adèle, which he still held, trembled a little in his; she hung her head and blushed deeply, but one word she did not speak. The orchard was very still; the waving shadows played on the grass, birds twittered in the boughs above them, still Adèle was silent; at length, and with a sudden effort, she broke the bonds of shame, and with maiden freedom she looked up bravely in his face.

"Do not laugh at me," she began, deprecatingly; "but you see I was a child the other day, and I am not yet accustomed to think myself a girl and a woman. You startled me by saying that I was going to marry you. I had just said it myself, but it did not seem the same thing. Oh, yes, I like you," she added, with a sudden, vehement warmth, that showed how full her heart was, "let Cousine bid me play with my doll, let Jeannette moan and shake her head, I will like you. You have been to me like the blessed sun of the good God, warm, genial, delightful. Before you came I wanted something; I did not know what it was, but I wanted it. Many a day have I sat and sung here, and sighed spite my singing. I was not sad, I was not unhappy, but I felt solitary and chill, as if I had lived too long in the shade, as if the sun that warmed others would never shine on me. You came, and I felt a great change. You came, all goodness, all kindness, and I felt that I wanted nothing more; that I, too, had my summer and my sun; and now, after asking me to live for ever with you, you say you know I like and esteem you. If you know but that, you know little; if you do not know that I love you much, very much, more than any one else; that I admire and respect you entirely, that I think myself happy and honoured to be your wife and the mother of your little girl; if you do not know that, what do you know?"

Rapid and ardent fell these words from the lips of the imprudent girl. More honest than wise, she spoke out her whole heart, and did not seem to feel or divine that much which is true may be withheld from a lover's ear. But was Mr. Osborne a lover? He heard her with emotion, indeed, but with an emotion which he mastered without effort. He was pleased that Adèle should be so fond of him, yet no strong passion blinded him to the nature of that fondness. It was the enthusiastic affection of a girl, it was grateful worship more than love, but it was sweet for all that. Kindly and earnestly he looked at her, but he had no time to reply; Lillian came bounding towards them with a joyous laugh, that rang in the old orchard like pleasant music. She was fond of Adèle in her capricious way, and to her, without much regard to propriety, she now went first.

"You did not go away," she cried, clapping her hands joyously, "you did not go away."

"Mademoiselle Adèle is not going away," said Mr. Osborne, quietly; "she is going to marry me and to stay here with us both. How do you like that?"

Lillian was not fond enough of her papa to be jealous. She was sitting on the knee of Adèle, and she looked up in her grave,

blushing face with an inquiring, surprised gaze, then she laughed carelessly, shook her curls, said she liked it very well, and began to examine curiously the pattern of her future stepmother's sleeve. Mr. Osborne was too just to be offended with a child, but he was sensitive enough to feel even the light sting of a child's indifference.

"Who loves me like that little girl?" he thought, and his look rested on Adèle so kindly, that she turned her face away, and rising, took Lillian's hand; but he, too, rose, and walked with them. Mr. Osborne felt in a happy mood. He had reached that state of moral repose which the fulfilment of a resolve gives to honourable and conscientious men. It had cost him much, more than might have seemed right or just, to decide on marrying Adèle, but that silent struggle was over, and it now bore its fruits and its rewards in the calm pleasure with which he lingered by the young girl's side on that serene autumn morning. He looked at his future wife, who was laughing and playing as simply as ever with his child; he saw her beauty, he remembered her innocence, he knew her native goodness, and he felt that if ever duty had come under a sweet aspect to him it was then. The dawn of happy days, free from passion and its torments, but blest by love and its joys, seemed to break before him, pure, tender, and mild, like the happy summer time.

"I do believe you are the best of little girls," he suddenly said, laying his hand on her shoulder, and looking down at her with tender admiration. Lillian was hunting a butterfly a few steps off; Adèle looked up at Mr. Osborne. "Oh, you are as good as you are handsome," she thought, with a beating heart; "may God make me but good enough for you," she added, after an internal pause. And thus they walked through the orchard and garden on that pleasant sunny morning, the child playing before and around them, his hand resting on her shoulder, his thought dwelling on her, her thought reverting to him; he thinking her the best of her kind; she worshipping him as best of all; neither what is called in love with the other, yet both very happy in each other.

Thus passed the morning, and thus too the day. Jeannette had kept aloof, and Mademoiselle de Janson had remained invisible; entire freedom was their lot. It had been a happy day; yet Adèle was not sorry to be once more alone in her own room, to sit down there and think awhile. She could not understand how Mr. Osborne could be so good and so kind, as to marry a poor, ignorant, little thing like Adèle de Courcelles. There was

something incredible in it; it was true, indeed, a fact; but it was very marvellous, and to be pondered over. She had not time to think on it long. Jeannette was knocking at her door.

"I will not let you in," cried Adèle, a little annoyed at being so soon disturbed; "no, I will not."

"It is Monsieur, who wishes to speak to Mademoiselle," said Jeannette, deprecatingly; "but if Mademoiselle is in bed——"

"No—no," interrupted Adèle, opening the door at once, "here I am; where is he?"

He was standing on the square landing behind Jeannette, who held a low, brass lamp; he came forward and excused himself for having disturbed her.

"But it could not be helped," he added; "Mademoiselle de Janson is evidently not of sane mind. She has just withdrawn the consent she freely gave yesterday; and as you are unfortunately not of age, and it would be rather long to wait for your twenty-first year, I have, to my great regret, been obliged to tell her, that rather than be thus trifled with, I would certainly take legal steps to free you from her control. I suppose you know the meaning of the French word of emancipation, as applied to such cases."

"I have heard of something like that," replied Adèle, very much startled; "but, pray do not do it; pray do not."

"Indeed, I should, and I would," he said, rather emphatically; "for, apart from personal motives, I would not let you remain under the control of so eccentric a lady; but do not look so frightened, there will be no need to resort to such extreme measures; your cousin has veered back again only——" here Mr. Osborne broke off rather abruptly, and taking the lamp from Jeannette's hand, he plainly told her to wait for him down stairs.

"I need not wait for Monsieur at all, unless Monsieur wants me," stiffly replied the old woman, anything but pleased with the intimation.

"Yes, I do want you," he said, quietly.

Jeannette went down grumbling. Her heart had swelled with indignation on hearing how this insolent foreigner had threatened Mademoiselle de Janson with the law because she would not let him have her little god-daughter as quietly as he wished. He interfere between them, indeed! Well, things were come to a pretty pass. Why should he marry Mademoiselle Adèle, she, Jeannette, should like to know. Angrily she brooded over those thoughts, and waited at the bottom of the staircase

for Mr. Osborne's descent; but Mr. Osborne seemed to have a great many things to say to his betrothed, if one might judge by the length of time he stayed upstairs. At length Jeannette could not bear this any longer; grumbling to herself that he might take it as he pleased, she went up; the landing was vacant and dark, save where a gleam of light stole out of the young girl's room. Jeannette entered it without knocking. Adèle was sitting on a chair with her face in her hands; she looked up abruptly; her eyes were glittering and bright; her cheeks burned like fire.

"Is Monsieur gone?" asked Jeannette.

"Yes—go away—he does not want you."

"Mademoiselle! something has happened."

"Nothing; go away. He is going away to-morrow morning; he will not come back till Tuesday week. Jeannette, I have a white dress, have I not?"

"Mademoiselle," cried Jeannette, in great alarm, "what do you want a white dress for? You are not going——"

"Yes, I am," interrupted Adèle, wilfully; "he has asked me to marry him next Tuesday week, and I have said yes. Cousine cannot afford to waste more than ten days on her cousin and god-daughter, it seems. She wants to get rid of me, and he wants to have me—let them both have their way."

Jeannette sat down on the floor, and groaned aloud.

"My poor lamb! my poor darling!" she began, "you are sold to the butcher. She has sold you, and he has bought you."

She shut her eyes, rocked herself to and fro, and groaned again. Adèle stamped her tiny foot, clasped her hands, and looked tragically inclined; it was too much to hear Mr. Osborne likened to a butcher; but precisely because it was too much, she bore it better than if it had been less.

"Jeannette," she said, a little loftily, "get up, and go to bed, and sleep; it is plain that you need it. Yet I beg to say, once for all, that I am no lamb to be bought or sold; nor am I tame—not at all, Jeannette. I am a De Courcelles,—that is to say, rather wild and wilful—an animal, if you like—oh, you need not turn up your eyes! a lamb is an animal, surely!—but one, at least, that has and owns no master. She sell—he buy—me—you insult me;—you insult him. I give myself, of my own free will, to a beloved master, and he takes with joy the thing he would scorn to buy. It is to be in ten days; I should not care a pin if it were to-morrow. All I feel, and that I do feel

keenly"—her eyes became dim, and her voice shook—"is, that I am thrust on him with indelicate, ungenerous haste; but he, in his goodness, does not seem to perceive that; all he sees and feels is, that he cannot take me too soon from her unkindness to his own kind keeping. Be it so, I say. And now go and sleep. He does not want you; he went down the other staircase, and forgot all about you. Good night!"

And Jeannette, who had risen whilst her young mistress spoke, was half-led and half-pushed out of the room, of which the door was at once closed and bolted on her.

"At length," thought Adèle, sinking back on her chair, "at length I shall be really alone. I shall be able to think."

Think! she could not think. Thought escaped from her troubled brain like water from the sieve of the Danaïdæ. All she felt and knew was, that she was going to marry Mr. Osborne; that he was leaving to-morrow, and coming back in ten days, and that they were to be wedded next Tuesday week. Her heart beat, her breath seemed gone at the thought. Her head ached, too. She threw herself on her bed, and there, she knew not how, she sank into a torpid dream, and slept. When she awoke, another day had wakened too; bright streaks divided the grey sky. Adèle sat up startled.

"Did I say my prayers last night?" she thought. She had not said them; she had forgotten them in the morning, because she was happy with Mr. Osborne in the orchard; she had forgotten them in the evening, because she was troubled with her hurried marriage. "I forgot Him in my joy; I did not go to Him in my trouble; I did not consult Him in my perplexity," she thought; "God will not bless that day."

Other thoughts also came to her; but they frightened her; she would not heed them; she jumped up; she opened the window; a small open carriage was driving away along the road; Mr. Osborne was in it. He saw her; took off his hat, and kissed his hand; and Adèle drew back, half-pleased, half-frightened.

Nine heavy, tedious days had rolled by.

"Oh, Cousine, Cousine, you will break my heart!" cried Adèle.

Passionately she threw down her work, and, vehemently rising, she clasped her hands, and walked up and down the old Hall with quick, agitated steps. The light of the lamp fell on her face—it was flushed, but sadly worn.

Mademoiselle de Janson leaned back in her chair, and gave her god-daughter a supercilious and ironical look.

Mr. Osborne had been gone nine days. The Monday evening was closing; but he had written twice, and the Tuesday morning was still fixed for the marriage. These nine days had been spent by Mademoiselle de Janson in teasing her god-daughter. She probed her through and through with taunts, with ironical congratulations, with little sneers, with lofty scorns, until Adèle felt as if a hundred wasps were stinging her daily. She had never experienced anything like it before. Mademoiselle de Janson had ever treated her with coldness, neglect, and deep indifference; she had never taken the trouble of tormenting her. Adèle had grown up unheeded, unloved, uncared for, it is true, but no domestic discipline had tamed her temper, and broken in her proud young spirit; she was still, as she had said herself to Jeannette, a creature wild, wilful, and free.

Intolerable, irritating beyond measure, therefore, was this change to her. She listened until she longed to fly, like a thing pursued, beyond the hunter's reach; she endured until unable to bear more, she broke out into passionate exclamations, half-indignant, half-imploring, but which only roused the disdainful wrath of her godmother.

"Pooh! pooh!" now said Mademoiselle de Janson, "what nonsense are you talking?—Break your heart!"

"You do! you do!" cried Adèle, vehemently; "you say I do not like him—that I marry him for his money. I do not care about his money—I do not. I love him; that is all."

"You do not!" deliberately said her godmother; "I repeat it; you do not love him. Never say in after times that you had not fair warning."

She spoke with emphatic solemnity.

Adèle, who was still walking up and down, stopped short, and looked at Mademoiselle de Janson. She turned red and pale; then suddenly she went up to her godmother, and, kneeling down on the floor by her, she looked up in her face, and said, softly—

"Why are you so unkind to me, Cousine? I do like him, indeed I do. You liked the father, why should I not like the son? He is good; he is kind. Why do you say I do not love him? pray tell me."

Beseeching was her look; imploring were her tones; but whenever it came to this pass between them, whenever some word of warning gravely uttered had rendered Adèle submissive, willing to be lectured, and to take good counsel, Mademoiselle de

Janson capriciously returned to the ironical mood, and repelled the young girl with some sharp sarcasm.

"Get up," she now said, impatiently; "all this is a comedy; you are a deceitful little thing, and I hate comedy."

Adèle started to her feet, red as fire.

"I am not deceitful!" she cried, indignantly. "I did not know how much I liked him until he asked me to marry him; but I know it now, and I love him with my whole soul—with my whole heart."

"I congratulate you!" ironically said Mademoiselle de Janson, rising.

Adèle felt that her godmother was not addressing her. She turned round quickly, and saw Mr. Osborne standing behind her. He had that moment arrived, and, unheard by her, he had entered the room even whilst she spoke.

"Pity to interfere with so tender a meeting," said Mademoiselle de Janson, sailing out of the apartment. Adèle remained standing in the centre of the Hall; for awhile she stood there calm and still; then shame, pain, mortification, were too much for her; she burst into tears. But Mr. Osborne would not let her grieve. Adèle scarcely knew how, but somehow or other she found herself sitting in her godmother's chair, and he was standing by her side, smiling kindly, and softly wiping her wet eyes with his hand. Evidently, unless she wanted him to go on with the tender task, she must cease weeping. She did so at once, and at once he sat down by her, and asked what ailed her. Her heart was too full for her not to tell him; besides, he was her only friend; out it came, crude and unmitigated—

"All this week Cousine has been saying it is not you I like, but your house and your money. There! what do you think of that?" she added, very scornfully.

Mr. Osborne reddened, not at what he heard, but at what he feared. He laughed, but not very sincerely; and he said, with a carelessness which did not prevent his look from seeking hers steadily—

"I think nothing of it so long as she does not say that I do not like you."

"Oh, but she could not say that," replied Adèle, smiling securely. He breathed relieved; Mademoiselle de Janson had not broken the solemn promise he had exacted, and she had given, that Adèle should never know how and why he had first thought of marrying her. So far, so good. He now set himself to consoling her, and he soon succeeded.

"You are thin and altered," he said, with kind concern; "but once we are married, no one shall have the power to tease or torment you. In every sense I will care for you. But will you be docile?" he asked, dubiously.

It was very pleasant to hear a voice of such kind and friendly solicitude. Adèle promised unlimited obedience.

"Then you must stay more within doors," he said; "you must not go out on cold, dewy mornings; you must not sit in the grass, or run bareheaded in the garden when a keen north wind is blowing—all of which you have been doing whilst I was away."

"So Jeannette has told you; she said she would; but it did not hurt me; I only caught a cold, which is gone now. I would have run any distance, any where, and in any weather, not to hear Cousine telling me—'You know you do not like him.'"

He smiled at the indignant vehemence with which she spoke—at the angry tears which glittered in her eyes.

"Why did you mind her?" he asked; "she did not know what she was saying. Pity her: she has suffered much. Yet I am half-angry with her; I see she has worn and tried you sorely. Well, it will be over to-morrow. All is settled as I wrote to you. I have made interest with the Préfet. The civil marriage is dispensed with for the present. The religious ceremony can take place to-morrow morning as early as we like; and when it is over we shall go to Lyons, and there be married again according to French and English law. Mademoiselle de Janson will not be satisfied unless these three marriages take place, and she must be obeyed. You will have rather a dull wedding-day, I fear, Adèle; no gay party of guests and friends; no pretty bridesmaids in white; nothing of what girls look forward to and like to remember."

"I do not care," she interrupted, quickly.

"But you will find," he continued, "that spite these important omissions, we shall be none the less truly married to-morrow morning. Ay, indeed, my little Adèle, to-morrow a new life begins for you; to-morrow Courcelles is yours to govern and to rule, from the garret to the kitchen; to-morrow Lillian Osborne is yours to rear and make a good girl of; and finally," he added, smiling at the earnestness with which she listened, "to-morrow William Osborne is yours to torment or to bless at your pleasure."

"You are laughing at me," said Adèle, shaking her head sagaciously; "yet I like to hear you speak so. There is ever

kindness in your irony. God made you good, and, though you should try ever so much, you cannot unmake His doing."

There was a truer appreciation of his real character in these words than Mr. Osborne would have given Adèle credit for. He looked at her attentively, and he felt as he looked, that the child was passing away, that the woman was coming. He smiled no more; tender and grave, though brief, was the rest of their discourse; they spoke of the morrow, but incidentally, like two friends who are going to take a journey together, and who know they can take it in mutual trust for mutual happiness.

When they parted, Adèle asked herself wonderingly, what had ailed her the last week? how and why the sarcasms and reproaches of her godmother had affected her so very strangely?

As snow melts in the sun, as night clouds pass away in the morning, so with the kind look of his eye, and the friendly touch of his hand, all doubt, all mistrust, all fear had passed away from her heart.



CHAPTER XXVII.

THE WEDDING-DAY.

WHAT did she dream of that night?—She never knew, but it was something sad and strange, for she awoke with a stifled sob, on which followed the joyous consciousness that she had been dreaming. But scarcely had she opened her eyes when she closed them again, dazzled by the vivid light that met them. Was day so far gone? She looked again. It was not the clear, bright light of day that filled her room. It was the light of a candle burning pale and faint on her table, and reflected in the little mirror above it, and that light shone on the troubled face of Jeannette, who stood at the foot of the bed looking at her with sad earnestness.

"What has happened?" cried Adèle, leaning upon one elbow—but before Jeannette could reply, the young girl sank back; nothing had happened, but she was to be married that morning. She could scarcely believe it. To agree to become Mr. Osborne's wife seemed one thing, and to be actually married to him seemed another.

"Mademoiselle must get up," said Jeannette, with a sigh.

Adèle rose silently. Sorely perplexed had Jeannette been for

the whole of that week. She could not discover whether she was pleased or sorry with the approaching marriage of her little mistress. That Mademoiselle Adèle should become the real mistress of Courcelles was great pride, but why was there that Monsieur Osborne?—Why should he step in and become the proprietor of Mademoiselle Adèle?—Jeannette did not like her master. She had nothing to say against him; he paid well, he did not grumble, he was not hard; but Jeannette did not like him—he was too pale. “I do not like such white women and men,” she thought; “there is no blood in their cheek, there is no life in their heart.” But the trifling objection of Mr. Osborne’s complexion was counterbalanced by so many advantages, personal and adventitious, that Jeannette could not have said whether she liked him to marry Adèle or not; and, fortunately for her peace of mind, the matter had been decided by those whom it concerned most, without reference to her opinion, and Jeannette had nothing to do with it but to dress her mistress. She went through with her task with silent diligence. When it was nearly over, Adèle sat down, and, leaning her cheek upon her hand, she said, gravely,—

“I hope I shall make a good wife to Monsieur Osborne, Jeannette.”

“I hope Monsieur will make a good husband to Mademoiselle,” said Jeannette, jealously.

“Oh, there is no fear of that,” was the prompt reply; “he is so good, so perfect.”

“Mademoiselle will spoil him if she begins by adoring him so,” observed Jeannette, with a frown; “husbands are conceited enough by nature.”

Adèle looked as if she were listening to a blasphemy, and asked how Jeannette could say such dreadful things.

“I do not say there are no conceited men,” she observed; “but he—oh, Jeannette! I hope I shall make a real Alcestis.”

“And is not Mademoiselle sure?”

Adèle looked doubtful.

“I am so fickle,” she began; “I thought it so delightful to be married last night, and I think it so strange this morning. Yes, I am fickle, and I am not sure that I am not deceitful too. But I hope that I shall make Monsieur Osborne a good wife. Oh, I hope he will never be sorry for having married me!”

“Sorry for having married a young and pretty girl like Mademoiselle de Courcelles,” indignantly began Jeannette, who

thought so much humility misplaced; a knock at the door interrupted her.

It was Mademoiselle de Janson, who sharply asked if they ever meant to be ready.

"I am ready, Cousine," said Adèle, hurriedly, fastening on her veil and orange wreath—"I am ready."

And she would have left the room without giving herself one look, if Jeannette had not resolutely detained her.

"Mademoiselle must look at herself," she said.

Adèle obeyed. The light of a dull day was breaking in her room, but she had a blooming cheek that could even brave that gloomy morning. Her white robes, her long thin veil and orange wreath, became her well. It was the first time in her life that Adèle saw her herself adorned. She looked at herself, laughed at her own beauty, and turned away her blushing face, whilst Jeannette took her hands and kissed them.

"God bless my dear little mistress!" she said, with much emotion; "and may she be as much loved as was the wife of my young master; but may she be happier—happier, by far, than was that poor little lady!"

"And Monsieur Osborne—do you wish Monsieur Osborne nothing?" asked Adèle, softly.

"And what more can I wish him than what he is taking?" asked Jeannette; "a pretty young lady whom he is fond of."

"As if he cared about my face!" impatiently exclaimed Adèle: "as if he were not too good and too wise to think about this."

"King Solomon—" began Jeannette.

Adèle turned crimson.

"You are not going to compare Monsieur Osborne to King Solomon?" she asked, gravely.

"Oh, no," pacifically replied Jeannette; "besides, it is time for Mademoiselle to be going."

"I had forgotten all about it," said Adèle; "will you not make yourself smart, Jeannette?"

"I am not going with Mademoiselle; I have an idea of my own: age is unlucky at weddings. I shall not go."

Jeannette's ideas were ever fixed stars. Adèle did not insist. She left her room without further delay. Yet in passing before Lilian's door, she suddenly paused. She remembered how she had entered that room ten days before, and yielding to a sudden impulse, she entered it again. Lilian was fast asleep; her flushed cheek was resting on her white pillow. Adèle bent over her, and kissed her softly. "I shall be very fond of you," she thought,

"and very good to you, Lilian, and never like the wicked step-mothers in the Fairy Tales." She embraced her again, and left without having wakened her.

At the foot of the staircase, Adèle found Jean, to whom she graciously gave her hand to kiss, and Mademoiselle de Janson, who looked on austere. Mademoiselle de Janson also looked like one who is going to witness a hanging, and who takes no pleasure in the execution. Odious and distasteful to her was this affair, as she called it, and sharp and short had she been with Adèle since it had been decided. She was now, on her god-daughter's wedding morn, anything but sweet, and receiving her with an abrupt remark of—

"Oh! you have managed to get ready, have you?"—she at once led her away through the garden.

A boat with two rowers was to take them across the lake to the little church, where they were to find Mr. Osborne. It was waiting at the foot of the steps. As Adèle entered it, she hesitated. She gave the grey garden a strange look, and clasped her hands to her beating heart. She put her foot forward and drew it back. She was bidding happy, girlish, maiden life a long adieu, and she felt it.

"Never more," a voice seemed to murmur behind her, "never more!"

"Well," austere said Mademoiselle de Janson.

At once Adèle entered, and was by her side, and at once the boat shot away.

"It will snow to-day," said Jeannette to Jean, whom, sorely against his will, she had kept within. "I wish the sun would shine, and I do think that people ought to marry in summer time."

"It is impossible," thought Adèle, in the boat; "until I see him, I shall not believe it." That proof was not denied her long. The boat stopped, she looked up, and Mr. Osborne stood on the bank ready to help Mademoiselle de Janson to land. She haughtily declined his aid. With a smile he let her step alone on shore, and turned to Adèle.

"Good morning," he said, as she took his proffered hand.

They exchanged one rapid look. He thought he had never seen her look half so pretty, and Adèle thought she had never seen him look half so serenely happy as on that morning. Calm content was in his whole aspect, and expressed his real state of mind. For the last week he had looked steadily at the bright side of his marriage with Adèle, and it had seemed to him preg-

nant with blessings. She was young, good and pretty. She had few faults, and her sunny temper and ardent heart effaced them. There was in her nature a strain of careless heroism and unconscious greatness, which nothing as yet had called forth, but which promised, he thought, a noble woman and a good wife. She was very fond of him, and he felt he could love her dearly. He loved her ingenuousness; he loved her youth, and good and wise as Adèle thought him, he loved her beauty. With marked attention he now looked at her from head to foot, then he smiled.

"Is there anything amiss?" she asked, with some emotion.

"Amiss! No, indeed. You are always pretty, of course; but you look lovely this morning."

It was the first time that he openly admired her. Adèle gave him an astonished look, not free from dismay, and there is no knowing what she might have said if her godmother had not interfered.

"You will have time enough to talk afterwards," she sharply said.

They walked on. Before them stood a low, damp church, to which Adèle parochially belonged. Grassgrown was the path that led to it, half-ruined the little belfry that rose above the porch.

"We shall repair it, shall we not?" asked Mr. Osborne of his young bride. "It must have a new bell in memory of to-day."

Adèle did not answer. She felt giddy, and seemed to tread on air. "I shall not believe it until I stand at the altar with him," she thought.

Her foot slipped as she went up the steps to the door; if he had not caught hold of her she would have fallen. He felt her trembling against his arm.

"Are you afraid?" he asked, in a whisper.

"Yes," she replied in the same tone; "and you?" she added, looking up at him.

"Not at all," he answered, with a secure smile. "Take courage. In a few minutes all will be over."

"Oh, no," thought Adèle, desperately; "in a few minutes all will begin: the marriage, the new life, the husband. If I could but run away!"

Run away, indeed! They were in the church. It was ancient, and built in the heavy Byzantine style; massive were its pillars, gloomy were its low arches; its windows of stained glass had escaped the revolutionary fury. Gold, purple and azure

tints fell on the cold flags, where half-effaced inscriptions still recorded how there, for many a century, the De Courcelles had been baptised, wedded, and buried. A crimson cloth and a white lace adorned the altar, bare unless on festive days; wax lights burned upon it, and an old priest was reading in a low tone the impressive epistle which the church has selected for the marriage service.

Before that altar, scarcely knowing how she had got there, Adèle stood by Mr. Osborne's side. She opened a white-bound prayer book, his gift, and she read the solemn admonitions of Saint Paul: "Wives obey your husbands, even as the Lord . . ." "Husbands love your wives as Christ loved his Church." With an agitated hand, she closed the book and looked up at him. Composure and serenity reigned in his aspect; no doubt, no fear, had found there way there. He answered her look with a smile, that said:

"What ails you? It is nothing—it will soon be over."

"We are the children of the Lord," murmured the priest; "we cannot wed as Pagans wed." Then he opened the Gospel; solemn fell from his lips the solemn words of the Redeemer: "Man shall leave his father and his mother, and cleave to his wife, and they shall be one flesh: let man not divide what God has joined."

And now the moment was come, and they were to be married. The old priest stepped down from the altar and the railings, and looked at them, and half smiled. He was a stranger to the place, he knew nothing of them; but they were young, beauty adorned them both, and goodness, virtue, and love seemed to him written in their two faces. He could not but smile, he could not but wish them well.

It was soon over; her hand was in his; they were questioned, and they replied; his ring was on her finger; she was his wife. All the blessings of marriage had been called down upon them both, and upon her especially. "May she follow the example of the holy women," said the priest; "may she be loved by her husband as Rachel was; wise like Rebecca; faithful like Sarah."

Adèle did not heed or hear him. She was kneeling on the cold flag; her burning forehead, her clasped hands, rested on the iron railing. She saw, she heard, she felt, she knew nothing, save that she was married. A gentle touch on her arm at length roused her; the priest was walking away; an old sacristan was extinguishing the wax lights, and stripping the altar. The

church was dark once more. All was over. Adèle rose, and mechanically took Mr. Osborne's arm. They walked out of the church; as they issued from the door and stood at the head of the steps, Mademoiselle de Janson looked sternly at the new-married pair, and coldly said,—

"You have had your way, both of you—I wish you joy. I should say that this marriage has been rather precipitate, were it not plain enough that the courtship has been going on a long time."

"You wrong me," said Mr. Osborne, reddening; "and my word, which I have passed to you, ought to acquit me."

"What!" exclaimed Mademoiselle de Janson, with feigned surprise, "what, you expect me to believe that a girl of sixteen, reared in modesty and reserve by me, would, without some previous agreement between you and her, have thus accepted you as soon as you offered yourself. No, Monsieur Osborne, I cannot believe that; Adèle likes you, of course; but I will never believe," emphatically added the lady, "that she had conceived a secret affection for a man who neither thought of nor sought her."

"For Heaven's sake, do not mind her!" said Mr. Osborne, turning to Adèle, who had hidden her burning face in her hands.

"However that may be," pitilessly continued Mademoiselle de Janson, who had kept this cutting sarcasm for a parting gift to her god-daughter, "I have now done with her and with you; but I give you fair warning, Monsieur Osborne; in her you have got an ungrateful, disobedient little traitor."

So saying, Mademoiselle de Janson turned away, with a lofty wave of her hand, and entered a travelling carriage which was waiting for her at the church gate. It slowly drove up a steep road; Adèle looked after it, mute and tearless, but with a strange expression of woe on her young face.

"A traitor!" she murmured, "a traitor!"

Mr. Osborne passed his arm around her, and drew her to his side.

"She is gone," he said, "let her go. She never loved you, or she had not parted from you with such mad, unkind words. Let her go. If you have but one friend remaining, remember that he will ever be the truest and the best."

"I will not cry on my wedding-day, I will not!" exclaimed Adèle, with some warmth.

She shook her head, as if to banish thought, lightly descended the church-steps, and in a sort of hurry she entered the boat. Mr. Osborne followed her in, and vainly looked for some shawl

or cloak in which to wrap her from the keen morning air. He chid her for her neglect; but she smiled at his fears. She was warm, quite warm, she said; and indeed, her cheek looked not merely flushed, but burning.

The boatmen had scarcely rowed them away a few steps, when Jeannette's prediction was fulfilled. The greyiness of the sky melted into snow; the awning partly protected Adèle; but still Mr. Osborne was uneasy. He urged the boatmen to make haste; spite her laughing resistance, he wrapped his wife in a coarse blanket which he found behind one of the cushions. Better spoil a wedding-dress than take cold.

At last the lake was crossed; the grey front of Courcelles rose before them; they skirted that ancient garden whence Adèle had so often looked down as a dreaming girl, and to which she returned a wedded-woman. The boat stopped; without waiting for his aid, she started up; it was snowing fast; she sprang up the stone steps and darted down the first path she found. Her nimble feet seemed to have got Mercury's wings; her veil floated behind her through the falling snow. In vain Mr. Osborne called her back; she did not hear; she neither answered nor looked round. She ran so quickly, too, that he could scarcely overtake her. At length he stood by her side, and his hand, lightly laid on her shoulder, arrested the fugitive. He stooped and looked in her face with a surprised smile.

"Look where you have brought us," he said.

They stood underneath the old lime-tree, the pride of Courcelles, but half-a-mile from the Manor. She turned round, and gave him a startled look. Was this Adèle? Her eyes shone like diamonds; her cheeks were flushed like roses; her red lips were parted: her whole aspect had a dazzling brightness that made Mr. Osborne look at her like one bewitched.

"Yes," said Adèle, smiling, "I am all covered with snow."

She shook her head; in a shower the light flakes fell from her veil and her orange wreath, but not from her dark hair; there they lay, like wintry blossoms; one, half melted, shone and sparkled in a cluster of dewdrops clear and glittering. Still he looked at her; amazed at her, confounded at himself.

"Oh, no, you will never believe that, will you?" she cried, with sudden warmth; "never! you know that I will love and obey you truly; and that I will die before I deceive you."

She turned her flushed face towards him. A little spark may kindle a great flame. Was he touched with the appeal? Did the beauty he had so often beheld unmoved affect him then?

Did the consciousness that she was his, penetrate a heart to which possession was sweeter than hope? We doubt it. We rather think that he had always liked her better than he knew: but all we have to tell is this—his left hand still rested on her shoulder; in his right he took and clasped both hers; her face still looked up to his; he bent his near it; for the first time, he kissed her; and from that hour he loved her.

Faster fell the snow; it whitened the paths and the dark hedges; it clung to the trunks of trees and to the stems of branches, like a soft white moss; it gave a lonely statue in its shallow harbour a chill, shroud-like garment, but it drifted past, and it did not touch the two beneath the lime-tree. Mr. Osborne leaned against its aged trunk; his left arm was still passed around his young wife, and held her bound to his side; his right hand still clasped both her own; his look was bent on her flushed and half-averted face with smiling pride. He smiled because of its beauty, and he was proud because that beauty called him master. But he did not speak, for what can happy love find to say on a marriage morn? He could not fear—she was his; he could not plead—she was won. He could only fill the present with a lover's fondness, and the future with a husband's hopes; he could only love, and gaze with calm delight on what he loved.

Ah, Love! thou art not always the child of doubt or desire; thou canst be born under cloudless skies, and nursed in the very lap of security. Thy fears and thy torments, the bliss of passionate young hearts, would be the curse of lives whose current already flows pure and still in its strength. Then it is well that thou shouldst come to some as thou camest to him on that day, without warning to caution past sorrows, without pain to trouble a weary heart, without dark hour of trial or suspense to humble a man's pride, with nothing but promises and blessings of which he could in his presumptuous happiness dare Fate to deny him the fulfilment.

"It is not snowing now," said Adèle.

He looked up; she spoke truly. The snow had ceased, the sky was clearing, the wind was still. He passed her arm within his, and led her away by the most sheltered path.

"But this is a long way," she once said, stopping.

"Was the lime-tree a short cut?" he asked smiling.

She hung her head abashed, and spoke no more.

They reached the outer door; they crossed the court, all white with snow, on the threshold of the Manor. Mr. Osborne paused a moment and looked at Adèle with a smile, which she

did not understand. He said nothing, but in his heart he blessed her; in his heart he welcomed again and again to his hearth and his home this bright young guest. She shook her impatient head, dropped his arm, and sprang in. With her seemed to enter youth, beauty, and love. He watched her lightly running up the stair case, until the hem of her white garment had vanished; then he entered the old Hall with a light in his eye and a smile on his lips, which neither had worn for many a day.

Through the range of windows before him he saw an autumn landscape, but the snow that had barely touched it was already melting in the heat of its morning sun, fervent and glowing as on a summer's morn; and as his look wandered over mountain, lake, and sky, reddening fast beneath his gaze, late happiness seemed like that sun over that cold lake to dawn over his chill life, and give to his sad noon the heavenly freshness and the pure ardour of a second morn.

But this was not a day to give to dreams, howsoever sweet. Mr. Osborne soon remembered that he was going; he rang, called Jean, and in a few minutes a strong, comfortable, travelling carriage, with a postillion to match, and stout, shaggy, brown horses, not handsome, indeed, but sturdy and enduring horses, that spoke of a mountain journey through wild roads, beneath overhanging pines, across foaming torrents, was waiting at the door of the Manor.

Ay, truly, and to the infinite disgust of Jeannette, who could not understand why people wanted to be married more than once, they were going away on their wedding-day to return in a week, day for day, said Adèle. She stood by the open door in travelling attire, bidding Lilian and Jeannette a light and gay adieu. She kissed Lilian again and again; she threw her arms around Jeannette's neck, and laid her fair though flushed cheek to the old woman's brown face.

"Why do you look so doleful?" she asked, putting on a pretty frown. "I know 'poor lamb' is on the tip of your tongue, only you dare not say it. Truly, one would think Monsieur Osborne is an ogre who is whipping me off and will never bring me back. I tell you I like going away with him—of course I do. Look at him as he stands there—he is as good as he is handsome."

With sad apathy Jeannette obeyed, and followed the look of her young mistress. Mr. Osborne stood outside the open door, talking to the red-faced postillion, and, as his wife said, he looked good and handsome. He looked happy, too; and when he sud-

denly turned round, and perceiving that she was ready, took the hand of Adèle and helped her in, there was something in the mingled tenderness and respect of that little courtesy that smote on Jeannette's heart. That wild road and that wild landscape were not green Normandy; Mr. Osborne was not much like her young master, nor did Adèle, save in size, resemble the little Countess; but it was the same fond love of the grown man for the child-wife, and Jeannette's whole soul yearned towards the husband of Adèle; he loved what she loved, even more than she did he loved it.

He turned back, he gave Lilian a kiss, he slipped something in Jeannette's hand, he entered the carriage. The brown horses shook their heads, the postillion cracked his whip, away down the stony road they rattled, and vanished.

Jeannette looked at her hand and saw there what she conceived to be a heap of gold pieces. "How rich he must be," she thought, marvelling. Mr. Osborne is anything but rich just now, and yet you are not quite in error, Jeannette. He is happy, he is in love, and happy love is richer than King Cræsus.

CHAPTER XXVIII

AT HOME.

THEY came back before the week was out. Late one evening the travelling carriage stopped at the gate of the Manor, which at once opened. The smiling, happy faces of Jean and Jeannette appeared behind the aperture; Jean holding the door in one hand, and his cap in the other; Jeannette bearing aloft a lamp, which shed its flickering light on the dark square mass of the carriage, touched the round haunch of one of the brown horses with a bright circle, and finally lost its shivering radiance in the vastness of the night and the gloom of the dark road.

"Hold the light nearer," said Mr. Osborne, as he alighted.

Jeannette obeyed, and peered anxiously to catch a glimpse of the face of her young mistress; but she only saw something dark, which Mr. Osborne took in his arms and laid down softly.

"How do you feel?" he asked, stooping. The cloak in which she was wrapped fell back partly; the dead white face of

Adèle appeared for a moment like a pale lightning flash passing across the darkness of the night; the next it vanished, for dazzled by the light which Jeannette held, she hid her head against her husband.

"How do you feel?" he asked again, and without waiting for a reply, he raised her in his arms and bore her in.

"Madame is ill!" exclaimed Jean, in much dismay, and without thinking of opening the door of the Hall, an omission which the quicker-witted Jeannette at once supplied. She opened the door; she preceded them with the lamp; she pushed forward a low couch, on which Mr. Osborne laid down his wife; and, without waiting for orders, she started back to the door, and said:

"Jean, run for Docteur Guillaume."

"Docteur Guillaume is coming," said Mr. Osborne, and sitting down by Adèle, he again asked how she felt.

"Happy!" was all she said, and throwing her arms around his neck, she embraced him with the ardent fondness of a child.

"Ah! Holy Virgin! she is very ill!" murmured Jeannette, clasping her hands.

Ay, she looked very ill indeed. Could a few days have produced so great, so sad a change? The white aspect, the hollow cheek, the sunken eyes, the fixed smile, the feverish look, spoke rather of a long, consuming disease.

"My little mistress—my little mistress!" moaned Jeannette.

He, too, seemed to undergo some strange agony of love and dread. And what strange thoughts came to him in that one moment, when he felt her cold cheek and burning lips meeting his: he saw her, pale and dead in a shroud; he stood mute and forlorn above a mound of earth; with involuntary passion, he suddenly snatched and pressed her to his heart, as if he could defy death to reach her there; then putting her away, he rose and exclaimed impatiently:

"Will Docteur Guillaume never come?"

But even as he spoke, Jean threw the door open, and, in his formal, old-fashioned servant's way, he announced—

"Monsieur le Docteur Guillaume."

Docteur Guillaume was as brisk and as cross as ever. He stepped in, bowed shortly, and his very first words were aggressive:

"Well, and what is the matter now?" he asked, sharply; he looked suspiciously at Mr. Osborne, evidently considering him the patient, and evidently, too, not much inclined to treat him

tenderly—a man who could disturb him from the enjoyment of his pleasant game of draughts with the curé, for no greater illness than appeared in him then.

"My wife is ill," said Mr. Osborne, sitting down by Adèle: "she took cold a few days ago on the lake, and has not been well since."

Docteur Guillaume drew a deep breath, and gave Mr. Osborne and his wife two surprised looks, which they received quietly and gravely. Then having partially recovered, he took a chair, drew it near the couch on which Adèle was reclining, felt her pulse, and looked long and attentively at her, but asked no questions.

"Madame has taken cold, as you say," he at length observed; "but it will be nothing. A little feverish. Eh! Yes, I thought so; sleepless too: I shall send you an opiate; it will be nothing."

He rose, bowed formally to them both, and left the room. Mr. Osborne seemed inclined to follow him out, but Adèle rested her head against his shoulder, and despotically forbade him to move.

"What do you want with that cross old Docteur Guillaume?" she asked; "he has a sharp, unpleasant way of looking one in the eyes. I never liked him since the day I waylaid him to know how you were."

"Why, what did he do to you then?" asked Mr. Osborne.

A light blush overspread her face, but she did not soften the truth.

"He all but told me I was in love with you: it was not true; I was not; though I did feel that if you were to die it would break my heart."

Mr. Osborne forgot Docteur Guillaume; he forgot even for the while that Adèle was ill; he only felt and remembered the sweetness of those frank confessions of which his young wife was imprudently lavish; he made her tell him the whole story of her meeting with Docteur Guillaume, and when she had told it, he smiled: it was sweet; it was very sweet to feel and know that this young girl, whom he now loved so much, had loved him long. But Adèle looked faint and weary.

"I think I shall go upstairs," she said; "oh, you need not carry me! I am not so ill as all that. Jeannette can help me if I want help. Where is Lilian? I should like to see her if she is not in bed; but if she sleeps, let her sleep; it is wearisome to lie awake and think."

There was a vacancy and a restlessness in her manner that brought back all her husband's uneasiness; but he had experi-

enced some difficulty in bringing Adèle to confess that anything ailed her; he had found that to be told that she looked ill seemed to irritate her almost beyond endurance; and though he now gave her an anxious, alarmed look, all he said was—

"Rest will do you good;" and ringing the bell, he consigned her to the care of Jeannette, who had retired on the entrance of Docteur Guillaume.

"She is really ill," thought Mr. Osborne, standing still in the centre of the room to think—"too ill for a cold; what can ail the child?"

"Monsieur le Docteur Guillaume wishes to speak to Monsieur," said Jean, opening the door; and almost before Mr. Osborne, much surprised, could utter the words "Show him in," the doctor had entered.

He sat down, clasped his two hands on his gold-headed cane, rested his chin on his two hands thus clasped, looked fixedly over at Mr. Osborne, and said in his brief, emphatic way—

"Doctors are privileged; they see, they hear all; they repeat nothing. I put no questions; but I say this, it will not do for Mademoiselle Adèle, or, rather, for Madame Osborne, to go on fretting in this way. It is her mind, not her body, that is ill; her mind must be relieved."

Mr. Osborne looked confounded.

"Docteur Guillaume, what are you saying?" he asked, a little indignantly. "Adèle took cold six days ago on the lake; but no grief, no trouble can ail her, save perhaps, that Mademoiselle de Janson, though she consented to our marriage, parted from her in anger."

"You know best," drily said Docteur Guillaume, rising, "I shall send the opiate presently."

He bowed, and was turning away; Mr. Osborne detained him.

"There is, there can be no sort of danger?" he said, anxiously.

"Not the least," was the short reply; and with his old-fashioned courtesy, Docteur Guillaume added, "I have the honor of wishing Monsieur good evening."

He was gone. Adèle fretting, Adèle ill through grief. The man was mad. Yet at once, without taking time to pause or think, Mr. Osborne went up to his wife's room. Adèle sat in a white morning gown, and with her loosened hair flowing around her, near the open window. Jeannette stood near her mistress.

"Leave us for a while," said Mr. Osborne.

The old woman obeyed, and closed the door. Mr. Osborne looked down at his wife.

“Adèle,” he said, “Docteur Guillaume says you are not ill, but fretting; is it true?”

Deadly paleness overspread her face.

“Do you believe him?” she asked, faintly.

“Child,” he cried, in a tone of some passion, “do you love me?”

She rose; she stood before him pale but still.

“Next to God!” she said, “next to God!”

And she shook like an aspen-leaf.

He took her in his arms, and begged her to forgive him; but Adèle had recovered enough to laugh at his remorse.

“As if I cared about either you or Docteur Guillaume!” she said, saucily; “I shall take his opiate though, when he sends it. It will seem very sweet to sleep.”

Even as she spoke, Jeannette knocked, and entered with a dark phial, which Mr. Osborne took from her hand. He read the labelled instructions carefully, then slowly poured out the contents in a wine-glass. Adèle watched him curiously.

“How dark and sluggish it looks,” she said, half-shivering; “and it makes one sleep; all Lethe in a wine-glass. Now, what would be the difference between that and a poison which kills? the quantity, I suppose—no more. You would be sorry, William, would you not,” she added, calling her husband for the first time by his Christian name, “if you were to find your wife dead to-morrow morning?”

He was handing her the glass. She saw a nervous tremor shake his hand as she spoke, even though he only smiled, and chid her good-humouredly for the dreary jest.

“I like people to feel my value,” she replied; “and unless I remind you that I am mortal, you may not prize me, sir.”

Mockingly she pledged him, and emptied the glass at once; then with strange, childish grace, she leaned her head against his shoulder, and pretended sleep sudden and overpowering, though she looked at him all the time through her half-shut eyes. How pretty was her pretty trifling; how well he liked it; how fond they were!

“She dotes on him, and he dotes on her!” thought Jeannette; “God bless them both!”

Adèle was ill six days; on the seventh morning after her return she awoke and said,—

"I feel quite well—I shall get up."

Jeannette remonstrated, and was not heeded.

"I tell you I am quite well," impatiently replied her mistress; and indeed, all languor, all fever, seemed to have left her by magic.

"They always were an obstinate family," grumbled Jeannette; "she has made up her mind that she will be well to-day, and she is well."

"Of course she is," gaily replied Adèle; "help me to dress."

Jeannette assumed an air of offended dignity, through which there pierced, strangely enough, a sense of strong, gratified pride.

"I shall not dress Madame any more," she said; "Madame's femme de chambre arrived last night at eleven, with Madame's corbeille."

Adèle was twisting up her hair; surprise fixed her in the attitude, then a burning blush rushed up to her face and suffused it.

"Where is he?" she cried eagerly; "why did he not tell me himself?—And I let him go this morning without a word. A maid and a corbeille!"

"No more than Monsieur was bound to do," stiffly said Jeannette.

"No more! no more!" and in her indignation Adèle stamped her foot; "and pray, if I gather a flower or weed from the grass, what more do I owe the thing than a drop of fresh water? And he—but you will never understand me—never. I tell you that for me—for any woman, to be taken and worn by him, is already sufficient blessing and honor; the rest is the superfluity of his own royal heart."

The six days' illness of his wife had rather distracted Mr. Osborne, and made "Monsieur behave a little oddly," in Jeannette's opinion. "But love always makes people more or less mad," she had charitably thought. She now came to the same lenient judgment with regard to Madame's speech. "It was all love; the poor little thing could no more help it than Monsieur could help sending twice in one night for Docteur Guillaume, who had very properly declined coming. It was all love."

So, resignedly bearing this strange madness of Mr. Osborne and his wife, Jeannette merely suggested that Madame should, by way of testifying her pleasure, avail herself at once of Madame Leroy's services and of the contents of the corbeille; and Jeannette more than hinted, that of the two the latter would be

the more acceptable. She hoped, at least, that it was not like the lady who had accompanied it.

"Oh! I hope she is not a dragon," cried Adèle, rather alarmed.

"Dragon or not, she must dress Madame this morning," resolutely replied Jeannette; and before Adèle could object or remonstrate, the maid was introduced to her mistress.

A tall, grave lady, of some thirty-five years, was Madame Leroy; majesty was her attribute. As some women are graceful and sprightly, so Madame Leroy was majestic. She had never been in a hurry in her life, she would have walked leisurely out of a house on fire; yet slow in act or speech she was not. She was simply majestic. Adèle looked at her with secret awe; benignantly Madame Leroy returned the gaze. She approved of her new mistress, and, professionally speaking, she admired her. Adèle had the sort of beauty which sets off an artist's talents—we are, every one of us, a bit selfish. She was a little wild, but Madame Leroy would alter all that in time; and when wildness is accompanied by perfect grace of motion and of look, Madame Leroy had good taste enough to know that it is not amiss. At once she assumed the authority of her position.

"Madame wants to dress and take a walk in the garden on this lovely morning, certainly: a morning negligée toilette, of course."

It did not occur to Adèle that she could resist; meekly and blindly she surrendered herself into Madame Leroy's hands.

This royal lady had arrived from Paris with Mr. Osborne's corbeille, as Jeannette had informed her mistress; but the word corbeille requires explanation.

Do English bridegrooms give corbeilles, or is that custom confined to France, the land of chivalry? A corbeille—we speak for the benefit of the ignorant, let the learned skip—may or may not be a real basket, but, fictitious or real, it holds a good many things. Indeed, it can hold anything which a bridegroom may choose to give to his wife, from a pocket-handkerchief—those of Prince D——— cost forty pounds each—to a diamond necklace. A Leghorn bonnet, a cashmere shawl, a pair of gloves, a silk dress, a lace collar, will fit in a corbeille; it is a most capacious basket, it will hold the smallest as well as the largest objects that adorn woman; above all, it ignores the trousseau, which is the bride's business, and of which the corbeille is wholly independent. It is given before marriage, of course—alas! there are no corbeilles afterwards—that magic basket pays but one visit; and if

Mr. Osborne's violated that sacred rule, it was because, being a forgetful man, he had not remembered the French custom until he was married, when he had in a great hurry written off to a Paris friend—need we say of what sex—and requested her to oblige him so far as to procure him a corbeille and a maid. By return of post Mr. Osborne received such a letter as only a French woman can write,—neat, elegant, natural, gently ironical on his forgetfulness, full of polite wishes for his happiness, and concluding with a series of appropriate questions: was Madame Osborne tall or short, plump or slender, dark or fair; in short, what was the character of her beauty, for Madame de Brieuve knew enough of her fastidious English friend to feel sure that none save a beautiful girl had stolen away his wandering liberty.

Adèle was reclining languidly in an arm-chair in her room, and Mr. Osborne was sitting by her, when he got Madame de Brieuve's letter. His wife saw him redden, smile, bite his lip, and, finally, look at her like one perplexed. She wondered what ailed him, but did not like to ask. At length a brilliant idea struck him. He rapidly drew, and speedily sent, Madame de Brieuve a portrait of his wife. It was enough. Within three days the corbeille came, under the shape of a square deal packing-case, and under the guardianship of Madame Leroy.

French women never commit mistakes in the toilet. If their laws are without appeal, it is because they are perfect—so perfect that they cannot be broken. Simply stating that there was nothing to say to this particular corbeille, save to praise it—we leave it to the number of the Boudoir (*Journal des Modes et des Salons*), in which it was analysed and gently commented upon the following week, as “another proof of the charmante Madame de B——'s tact and correct taste.” Whether the article was written by Madame de B—— or not, does not concern this story.

The contents of that corbeille were now scattered in the room of Adèle; and Jeannette, with a secret admiration at Mr. Osborne's wealth and generosity, which she would have scorned to betray, Adèle with childish wonder, and Madame Leroy with cool majesty, were looking and examining.

“I suppose Madame will wear this morning dress,” said Madame Leroy, displaying a rich, loose robe of a soft Indian silk that dazzled Adèle with its splendour.

“What a pity to put it on in the garden,” she said, hesitatingly.

Jeannette was on thorns.

“When my young master was married,” she said, “Madame”

la Comtesse, your grandmother, wore a sky-blue silk damask cloak to have her hair powdered in; and the naughty little thing used to run about the château in it, to make my young master, your grandfather, run after her, which he did, of course," added Jeanette, with a sigh; "the cloak did not last a week between them."

Adèle heard her with an abstracted smile, and told Madame Leroy to do as she pleased; the result of which judicious resolve was a negligée toilet, rich, luxurious, very careless, and the perfection of good taste. Without so much as looking at herself in the glass, Adèle went straight down to her husband's study.

Mr. Osborne was writing a business letter; but even whilst he was writing he was thinking of Adèle. What could ail her? Was her complaint all mental? As Docteur Guillaume had bluntly said—What could ail her? When would that strange fever and languor leave her? Suddenly he felt a shadow falling on the floor between him and the sun; he looked up, and saw his wife standing before him, smiling with a silent and modest grace which he had never seen in the wild and careless girl. Yes, verily she stood there, fair and almost as blooming as ever, not in the least ill. She seemed amused at his surprise, at his pleasure, at his fond welcome, at the fond admiration with which, after a while, he put her away from him, held her out at arm's length, and smiled.

"Do you really think me so very pretty?" she asked, suddenly.

She was biting the end of a green twig which she had gathered on passing through the garden; and she spoke and looked with a sort of fixed curiosity.

"Of course I do; why do you ask?"

"Because you never showed it before we were married."

"I had no right to do so then."

"No right!" and she gave him an odd look.

"Ay, no right! Throw that away, child; you are biting your lip; you have hurt yourself."

He had already taken a way of calling her child, and of treating her like a child most tenderly loved indeed, but requiring fond control as well as fond caresses. And quite simply, quite naturally, Adèle had fallen into the way of obeying him blindly. At once she threw away the offending twig, and said, submissively—

"I can walk in the garden, can I not?"

"Under my guidance I believe you can."

The garden was very pleasant; the sun was warm; the brown mountains had a cheerful look; the green aspect of the lake was delightful.

"Oh, let me run!" cried Adèle, with sudden eagerness.

"Run after a week's illness! no, indeed. Come this way; the wind is too keen there."

She submitted without demur to this watchful tenderness. They went on a few yards; then suddenly she stopped short, and stood still, whilst Mr. Osborne enjoyed her surprise.

The Manor rose before them; but the little arched colonnade and portico Mr. Osborne was so fond of, were now closed. Glass frames had suddenly transformed them into a conservatory. Through the crystal front that gleamed in the sunshine Adèle saw the tall, green plants within, and the shivering gleam of a little fountain in the centre. At the head of the flight of steps, by the open door, a gorgeous bird, with yellow breast, and azure wings, and drooping tail, stood on his perch. On seeing them, he flapped his wings, and screamed.

"He welcomes his mistress," said Mr. Osborne. Adèle went up the steps, then paused.

"Does he bite?" she asked, prudently keeping back.

"I have experimented his temper for three successive days, and I can pronounce it perfect."

Adèle went up to her new subject, and took him on her finger; she gently stroked and caressed him, and found him, spite his bright plumage, meek as any pale dove. Then she put him back, and entered the conservatory.

"Ah, how beautiful!" she said, clasping her hands in admiration. "Ah, how beautiful!"

Her husband laid his hand on her shoulder, and said, kindly—

"I am glad you like it. You can enter it from the drawing-room, safe from cold or air; and perhaps it will take from you the wish of running out on the cold winter days that are coming."

She looked up at him earnestly.

"Did you have that built for me?" she asked.

"For whom else?"

"Did you buy that bird for me?"

But this time he only smiled, without replying. The question amused him. What should he want with a bird? Adèle remained very quiet. She looked at the flowers and plants one by one; she asked to know their names, and heard them seriously, like one bent on remembering what she heard. She stood by the fountain, and after a cry of admiration and surprise

at the gold fish darting about in the basin—they were the first she had seen—she turned back to the bird at the door. He gave her a knowing side-look of his brown eye, and took from her hand the crumbs of cake which her husband had placed in it.

"Sit down now, you are tired," said Mr. Osborne. He drew forward a low, rustic chair, on which Adèle sank like one in a dream. The beautiful flowers and plants were all around her; before her stood the bird, bowing his little body to win her attention; behind her she heard the murmur and the splash of the little fountain. The broad stone steps descended to the sanded alley that passed between the tall evergreens on either side, and ended in a white statue in its niche; shadow broke into sunshine, and sunshine darkened into shadow, with every cloud that floated in the blue sky above; a stillness that was not entire silence, that did not exclude the twittering of birds, the rustling of leaves, the vague breathing of the low autumn wind, enclosed the spot. Adèle gently took her husband's hand, and spaniel-like leaned her head against it.

"I shall often come and sit here," she said; "and every time I come I shall think how good he is, how happy he wants to make me."

It was true enough. It was his ambition and his desire to make her happy, the happiest of women. Most real, therefore, was his pleasure to find her so pleased. Tenderly, though gravely, he looked down at her and smiled. She resumed:

"Where is Lilian? Let her see and enjoy it too."

"Lilian has seen and enjoyed it all. She has broken a plant and teased the bird, this very morning. I sent her upstairs to close confinement; but she shall be forgiven in honour of your recovery, and even dine with us this evening. Ah! you are come back, Monsieur Morel. Well, what news do you bring?" He addressed the foreman, whom he had seen coming up the alley; but Adèle had seen nothing; with a start she dropped her husband's hand and looked up.

Monsieur Morel stood before them, as humble, as obsequious as ever. He had been a fortnight away on business; he had learned the marriage of his master on his return, and it had roused in him a strange retrospectively jealous wrath. Spitefully, through all his external humility, he looked at Adèle. He had never liked her really, though he had strangely fancied that she liked him; but he had known her to be rich when she seemed poor, and gold was a great deal more tempting than beauty in the eyes of M. Morel. Ay, he had seen the foolish girl's money go down the

slippery path of ruin like a rolling stone he could have stopped in its course, and he found it galling to remember that this fortune, which he might so easily and would so willingly have grasped, had slipped through his fingers. And why, forsooth! Because she would not have him!

Extraordinary ambition is rarely without the company of extraordinary impudence. And with a cool confidence in his merits and in his rights, which failure might irritate but could not destroy, M. Morel thought, as he looked moodily at the new-married pair, "I should like to know why I could not do as well for the husband of Mademoiselle Adèle as another man? He took her without a son, like a fool. She would be a wealthy woman still if I had had her."

"I do not bring very good news," he meekly said, aloud; "there has been another failure, as Monsieur expected."

"Indeed," carelessly said Mr. Osborne.

And so negligently did he treat this announcement of loss, that Adèle naturally thought: "How rich he must be!" He quietly turned towards her, and excused himself for leaving her awhile.

"I shall wait here for you," she said.

"Here! I may be long away; it may get cold."

"I shall go to my room if you like it."

He said he did like it, and praised her as the best of little girls. Adèle gave him a look half-sad, half-mirthful; then rose, turned away, walked down the conservatory, and vanished under the door that led to the drawing-room.

Mr. Osborne looked after her until she disappeared, then he turned back and found Monsieur Morel gazing steadfastly at him.

"So they have failed?" he said.

"They have. Monsieur will find the details in the counting-house."

Mr. Osborne did not answer; he looked absent and thoughtful.

"I met Monsieur de Launay three days ago," said the foreman; "he wanted to sound me; but I was too deep. How could I tell whether Monsieur was inclined or not to take partners?"

Mr. Osborne smiled slowly.

"You behaved with your accustomed prudence," he said.

"Monsieur de Launay wanted me to hint at least the matter to Monsieur."

"As you do now," interrupted Mr. Osborne.

"But he did not want me to mention our meeting," said Monsieur Morel, pointedly.

"Of course not, and by mentioning it you keep on the safe side of me, even as by mentioning the partnership you keep on the safe side of Monsieur de Launay. You are a wise man."

"Monsieur is too good."

"Not at all; but my eyes are open to all your merits."

He descended the steps; the foreman followed. He was not vexed at being read; he was prepared to find other men as keen as himself; though he was not prepared where the chances were equal to find them prevail against him. "They laugh best who laugh last," he thought, as he descended the steps after his master. "Much you know about me, clear-sighted as you are."

Little, very little, indeed, did Mr. Osborne know of that dark secret; but that little was infinite to what Monsieur Morel knew of his master. The archangel whose conquering foot crushed Satan could catch a glimpse, at least, of that rebellious spirit's heart, even as light can pierce darkness; but the fallen one gazed in vain on the celestial beauty of God's messenger; too dazzling a mystery for him to comprehend. To know heaven is to be in heaven; to understand the good is to be in some sort good.

"So he builds her conservatories, and he does not know but he may be bankrupt to-morrow. All that for a pair of blue eyes!" thought Morel, taking the only view he could take of his master's marriage. "Birds too! the man is mad!" For so much expense could not be justified, even by her eyes; the only charm Morel recognised in Adèle.

Obediently she had gone up to her room; but when she opened the door and stood on the threshold, she stopped bewildered. Surely this was not the little bare room she had left two hours before. This was some enchanted bower which some good genius had touched with his wand in her absence. Alas, no! it was still her little room; love had only adorned it a little—money had only helped love. But Adèle was sixteen, and sixteen is ever reading a marvellous tale, an endless romance. She gazed around her amazed; she trod with hesitating step on a Turkey carpet; with timid hand she opened a Buhl piece of furniture, and started back on seeing her own half-frightened image looking at her from a clear mirror; then she sat down on a chair, and cried.

"Oh, Mademoiselle! Mademoiselle!" cried Jeannette, who was peeping through the slit of the door, and who expected something very different from tears.

"Oh, he must not be so kind," exclaimed Adèle, starting to her feet; "he must not, or I am undone!"

"Ah, bah! it is not more than Madame deserves," strongly

said Jeannette; "but has Madame seen the workbox and the pretty desk? Ah, well, money is a fine thing!"

The desk, the workbox, were admired by Adèle, but more with reference to the giver than on the score of their own merits.

"Ah, how good he is!" she said, again and again. "He builds me a conservatory; he buys me a rare bird; he gives me a room fit for a queen. There is not another man like him, not one,—is there, Jeannette?"

"Certainly not," gravely replied the old woman. "I suppose Madame Leroy shall dress Madame for dinner?"

Adèle supposed so too; the majestic Madame Leroy appeared, and accomplished another prodigy of art, but, like great works of art, so slow, that the day, which had not stood still all this time, was nearly waning when Adèle went down to the Hall to preside for the first time at her husband's board.

Mr. Osborne was sitting near one of the windows, and Lilian was perched on his knee. She jumped down on seeing Adèle, and ran up to her with an admiring cry.

"Oh, how beautiful you are!" then followed separate, minute ecstasies on everything Adèle wore, with which we need not trouble the reader. Lilian was like the world; Adèle in her brown frock and Adèle in her shining silken attire were not the same being. The one had never been but a little girl to play with; the other was a lovely lady to call mamma and be fond of.

"Everything comes to me through him," thought Adèle, even whilst she caressed Lilian; "everything, ay, even the fondness of his little girl."

The dinner was quiet and not too long. Once or twice Adèle looked up at her husband dubiously, and at length she said,—

"If I commit mistakes, pray tell me—I shall not mind—I wish to do everything as you wish—as is right."

Mr. Osborne's only reply was to drink the health of Mrs. Osborne in some of that lady's own wine; the health of Miss Osborne followed, then Mrs. Osborne was pledged again by her husband. Was it the wine or was it pleasure that made his dark eyes shine rather more than was their want; that gave his calm, handsome face a flushed look, a happy smile, and to his whole aspect something rather triumphant? He did feel in a most happy mood. He had made a vow not to think of business until sunrise, and he kept it religiously. He had plenty else to think of. He had had his cares, his trials, his miseries, like other men; like other men, too, he now had one of those happy hours which the bountiful hand of God showers on all men, on the whole broad earth.

He had it, and he enjoyed it thoroughly. He felt himself, William Osborne, a man of thirty, strong, handsome, in the prime of life, independent, too; master of a fine old house, and very respectable cellar, and of all the appendages to both. He saw himself sitting in an ancient Hall, with the fire shining back from its panels of warm, brown oak; before him was spread cheer abundant and good; crystal and plate sparkled on his table; ruby wine filled his glass; it was pleasant,—ay, truly, it was cheering and genial to be master of these good things; and better than house, good table, and good wine, it was to glance at the pretty child on his left, and know that she was his child; to look at the blooming young wife before him, and rejoice with a man's pride as well as with a man's fondness, that she was his, and none but his.

And now the dinner is over. Lilian has been dismissed by her papa, who wishes to remain alone with his wife. A kind kiss and a plateful of cakes have reconciled Lilian to her exile; father and daughter part in mutual amity. No tiresome childish jealousy embitters Mr. Osborne's hours of love. His little girl is a good little girl, who does not fret herself and torment him because she has a rival already more fondly loved than she is in her father's heart. Mr. Osborne's conscience does not reproach him for the preference: a lover, a husband, will carry off Lilian in a few years. And Adèle is his own little Adèle for ever. God gave her, and God alone can take her away from her husband's arms. There she shall remain to the end of both their beauty and their youth; to the consummation of their years; to the close of their mortal life, and the dawn of the heavenly.

Not that Mr. Osborne is thinking of that just now; no, he is sitting by the fire, and his wife is sitting on her stool at his feet. The firelight plays on her face, and shines back from her eyes, raised and fixed full on his as his are bent on hers.

"I have seen my room," she said; "I see you want to turn my life into a fairy tale. What was I when you found me? a little Cinderella, obscure and forlorn; a fallen princess, poorer than any peasant-girl. And you have given me back the kingdom I had lost, and more; you have dressed me in costly silks and laces such as I never wore before; you have changed my poor little room into the boudoir of a lady."

"And I am the prince, too, as well as the godmother," said Mr. Osborne, raising her, and drawing her towards him.

"You are my prince and my king," she said, with some vehemence. "You are all I have; what can I say to you?—that I

am grateful, you would not like it. I can say nothing, save that from the first moment when I saw you enter this room, and I looked up at you still on my knees, I thought you looked like a good angel; and truly a good angel you have been to me."

She spoke in a low voice steady and clear. He pressed her to his heart; he called her by the dearest name he could find; he called her his wife; and pure, perfect content passed like sunlight over his noble and handsome face.

Truly he loved her very much. He had found her without seeking, as some traveller may find, amidst the stones of his arid path, a gem of great price. He did not wish for it; he does not want it; this boundless treasure makes him none the richer; but he cannot and will not restore it; it is a thing to wear hidden near his heart, to rejoice over in secret, a most useless and costly joy. Mr. Osborne had not wished for his young wife; he had found her, taken her, and now he loved her. She was a tie, a burden, a new care; but he loved her infinitely, for all that.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A FIRST PARTING.

THE day was dark, sullen, and gusty; swollen clouds passed along the sky, or dropped in thin mists above the brown edge of the mountains; autumn gales moaned above the grey lake, and bowed the pines on the hill side.

Adèle stood in one of the deep windows of the Hall looking at them; she saw them bend and rise again, and she smiled. "There is no hope for you," she thought, "none! the wind and the storm are your masters; you are bound to your place of torment without hope of redemption. Then bear your lot! Often on stormy days like this, often on bleak nights when I lay warm in bed between sleep and waking, I have heard your moanings, and I have pitied you; and what has your lamenting—what has my pity availed you? You were made to rejoice for a little while in sunshine and summer breeze, to be vexed by unquiet winds, and beaten by angry rains—your final end to be uprooted by the storm, or felled by the woodman's axe. Then bear your lot, I say; it will not last—nothing lasts—it seems eternal now.

Be patient; when you lie dead and withered on the mountain, you will be safe—oh, then you can defy the might and passion of the fiercest storm."

Mr. Osborne was reclining on a low couch by the blazing wood fire; papers were scattered around him, but he had dropped them to think, and his thoughts did not seem pleasant. With a sigh he looked up and searched for Adèle. He saw her standing in the window, leaning against the wall with drooping arms and clasped hands. Her cheek was colourless; her eyes were sunken, dark, and fixed; pale were her parted lips. He started uneasily.

"Child," he said, "what ails you?"

She turned round laughing.

"What should ail me? I am only looking at those trees. I left you because I saw you were busy. What ails you, rather, sir?" she added, coming back to him, and sitting down by his side. "I know those letters teased you; I saw you bite your lip. Put them away, and rest."

She pushed the papers on one side, and clasped her two arms around his neck. He submitted; his head sank on her shoulder. He sent the weary cares of life back, far back into oblivion and night; and for the moment remembering only her, he felt like one who has drunk of some divine opiate, calmly blest.

It might be folly, but he could not help it. The sweetness of that new existence had stolen over him with the subtle power of enchantment. He had married from Honour, and instead of finding Duty between him and his bride, he had found Love, a divine child, slumbering in her arms. It was, as if Adèle had said to him with smiling defiance: "If you have me, you must have Love too; never can we be divided." He yielded, and who would have resisted. Passion called him, and he obeyed her voice. She awoke him from the torpor of years to a younger and a newer existence; she melted the long chill from his life, and sent coldness to the winds; she taught him how dearer far than the dearest solitude can be a loved presence.

"Love and be loved, whilst you can," she said; "enjoy the feeling none can disturb, the tie fondness can make more dear and has not—rare and holy privilege!—the power to profane." He obeyed her. Truly it was the cup of Circe, and he drank it drop by drop, and every drop seemed sweeter than the last to a heart long athirst and never sated.

Suddenly he started; the wind had brought him the sound of a distant clock striking the hours in a mountain church. He unclasped her arms and rose.

"I must go," he said.

"Go?" she cried, amazed.

"Yes; I could not bear to tell you till the last moment. Good-bye! God bless you."

"You must be jesting," she said.

"Would I were. I shall not be long away. Do not cry. Take care of yourself and of Lilian. Indeed, I shall not be long away."

"And you are going now—now."

"Ay, now. I thought I had another hour, and I have not."

He looked so reluctant to go, so pained to leave her, that Adèle could not have reproached him, even if she would; but her heart had no room for accusation; she submitted without a word; she accompanied him to the gate; there they both paused for the final parting, whilst Joli, held by Jean, who discreetly looked down the bleak, wild road, quietly waited for his rider.

"No, no, you must not go, or you must take me with you," cried Adèle, with a sudden passion of sobs and tears. "I tell you I cannot stay here without you. If I do I am undone. Stay or take me."

"I cannot."

"You must."

She clung to him with feverish ardour. He felt himself growing very weak; he would not argue, for to argue was to yield. He stooped, he kissed her again and again, then he suddenly disengaged himself from her arms, and was gone in a moment. Joli galloped away, and his rider did not venture to look back until the delving road had hid the Manor.

He had conquered, yet he was angry with himself. Why had he not taken her with him? the season was not so bleak that she could not travel. She asked to come, and he wished it in his heart; for he might be, not days, but weeks away, weeks without seeing her.

"Is life so long," he asked of his own thoughts, "that we should cast away its dearest prizes as things of no worth. The happiest confess it, the first sweetness of love does not linger. Something else comes, much better of course, and much wiser, but, alas! it is not that! it is not the bloom of the flower; the first breath, the delightful promise of spring. Years will come to us both, years and their coldness. Shall I trust to a doubtful Future. To-day is barely mine—shall I count on to-morrow?"

He hesitated no more. He turned the head of his horse, and

rode back. It was weakness and folly; but what matter, and what need he care?

He passed by the closed Manor, and rode round to the counting-house. He had to countermand some orders which he had given to M. Morel, and to give some new orders, which his change of purpose required. And he wished to do this at once and be free. He found M. Morel, as usual, sallow, diligent, and zealous.

"I presume Monsieur is come to see to the matter I mentioned yesterday?" he began.

"There is time enough for that," interrupted Mr. Osborne; "I am not going to-day. You will please to attend to these instructions;" he rapidly wrote down a few lines, handed them to the foreman, and left.

M. Morel bit the end of his pen, and looked after his patron. "There is an end to all things," he said to himself, "even to love—and to business too sometimes."

He took up the paper which Mr. Osborne had left, and looked at it moodily. His eyes read, but his thoughts were absent; he seemed fixed into sullen meditation.

Mr. Osborne entered the garden by a low door, of which he always carried the key in his pocket, and walked straight to the Manor. But, before reaching it, he paused; in the alley of evergreens that led to the new conservatory, he had heard the voice of his wife. He looked round sharply; a gap in the row of trees showed her to him standing in the centre of the alley. He bit his lip with displeasure; she was bareheaded; she wore neither cloak nor shawl; the keen wind blew the hair from her pale face and fluttered her silk dress around her thinly clad feet.

"Mademoiselle, Madame, I mean, this is dreadful!" cried Jeannette, who unceremoniously held her mistress's lace sleeve. "You will kill yourself—you must not go."

A frown gathered on the smooth brow of Adèle. She turned coldly on the old woman, and said, briefly:

"Let me go, Jeannette."

"I will not; Madame is married, but none the wiser."

Adèle stamped her foot; a strange, stern expression passed athwart her gentle little face as lightning may pass across a pale sky. "I am not married to-day," she cried; "I am not married to-day."

"Ay, it is a month to-day," said Jeannette, who had not heard rightly; "a month this very day."

Adèle clasped her hands to her brow, and looked half wild.

"A month?" she moaned, "a month! Why did I not die a month ago?"

Her pale face, her look, her tone, breathed misery and despair. Jeannette dropped the sleeve of her mistress and looked petrified. Adèle darted down the alley, and vanished.

Mr. Osborne looked neither right nor left, but went on; he entered the house, he ascended the staircase, he never paused until he reached the room of his wife. Then, indeed, he looked around him, and asked himself what had brought him there.

What had brought him? The instinct of suffering, that sends us in grief to the very spots where we have been most blest. In that room he had found his Paradise and his Eve, and there he now met his serpent; for, alas! we all have ours. Her work lay thrown on the table; ay, he had snatched it that morning from her hand, and pacified her with a kiss; her drawing was turned to the wall; foolish and fond had been yesterday's lesson. Stung to the heart, trembling with anger and shame, he turned away, and her pale, sleeping face resting on the pillow of the low, simple bed, rose before him, as he had seen it during the vigils of her seven days' illness, during those nights when sitting by her he had either trembled lest death should snatch away his newly-found treasure, or indulged in the hopes of a future, which seemed to his craving heart as if it never could be too sweet.

And now, he remembered the face of pale revolt he had seen in the garden. And now, oh, misery! misery! he knew what his fancied bliss had all the time been worth, how he had never had a wife, never for one moment; never, but a sad, a rebellious girl, who laughed when her heart was breaking; who when she threw her arms around his neck so fondly that morning, would have preferred solitude on the most arid mountain peak, to the pleasant fireside with him. He bit his lip, he breathed hard. The mere thought exasperated him to a sort of fury. Proud, delicate in all his feelings, sensitive to weakness, it revolted him to think that his love had been an infliction, that he had been endured as a duty, not welcomed as bringing happiness. Endured! Insult from woman to man could not go beyond this. And yet with all this anger there blended a keen, fond sorrow he could not control; something that seemed to cry within him, "Lost and gone—lost, lost for ever." Something that made him stoop; and pressing his lips on the pillow of his wife, lay his head there and cry like a child. For, alas! if he was not loved, he could not at once cease to love. He had wakened with

Adèle in his heart that morning, and she could not have left it before the night. But it was soon over. Soon he rose, drearily looked around him, and drearily thought, "I married her a month ago."

Ay, she was his wife. That girl who had said, "I am not married to-day," to whom his absence had been what liberty is to the slave, that girl who had raised the despairing cry, "Why did I not die a month ago?" was his wife. His wife! he laughed with bitter anger; it was the same thought again and again; the same pain that could not weary of its sting. He paced the narrow room up and down, and called up the tormenting past. He saw her once more with that submission which had enchanted him, because he thought that it sprang from the silent acquiescence of a happy heart, and which was the result of inexorable will, strange in one so young. The fond hours that had been so delightful, now haunted him like spectres. Folly, passion, love, weakness, had filled them to overflowing. How sweet they had been—how more bitter by far than wormwood they were now to his proud heart!

Alas! her years, which had scarcely left childhood behind, her ignorance, which was entire, had undone him. He would have given more of what is called his confidence to an older woman; that is to say, he would have told her his business, his fears, his anxieties, but he would have locked up his heart from her penetrating gaze; his very fondness would have been tempered with reserve and dignity. And with Adèle he had hidden nothing. He had laid himself open to her from the first day to the last. For what was she? a fond little girl, who only wanted to be cherished and beloved! And that mere child of sixteen had deceived him! That light, girlish look had beheld in him a man—a man of thirty—those fitful weaknesses which love can never see, for it shares them. His very heart burned with resentment at the thought, and with a resentment that soon shaped itself into a resolve.

Mr. Osborne had many high and noble qualities, but he had also one fault that comprises many—a silent, sullen temper. He never got angry, or, at least, rarely; he seldom spoke in a passion; but in proportion to the sensitiveness that made him careful with others, he jealously brooded over an offence, and rarely forgot a wrong.

Why speak to Adèle—question or upbraid her? It was useless, worse than useless; what he had learned in a moment from her lips, the experience of a few more weeks would have

told him as plainly, as bitterly. Upbraidings lead to strife—strife to misery. In silence he would bear his share; in silence she should bear hers. Their wedded life would be unblest and cold; children not born of love would spring and grow around them; but the scenes, the quarrels, the bitter recriminations of his first marriage, should never sully his second. And with sullen anger he vowed, too, that though Adèle should never be able to tax him with coldness, neglect, or unkindness, she should never again find him what he had been; the husband she should have—it was not in his power to break that tie—but never more the lover.

And alas! he could take that vow. For a month he had laid himself at the feet of a careless child, indulged with passionate ardour in a happy delusion, but with that delusion vanished ardour and passion. He awoke from the burning dream; a cold, icy hand was laid on his heart, and stilled it like death. "What I have borne once I can bear again," he thought. "My first wife deceived me, why should the second be more true? At least, I did not marry *her* for love. No blind passion, no fond fancy, threw me helpless on the mercy of a girl. I took her from honour, from duty. I thought I had found love, too, a wife as well as a woman. Well, it was a mistake, no more. It can be borne, my poor little Adèle."

He left her room, descended the staircase, crossed the garden, and met no one.

M. Morel was busy writing, but the opening door behind him made him look around. He turned, and saw his patron. Mr. Osborne was always pale, but now he was white; his brow, his cheek, his lip, were rigid and colourless. His look was no longer calm and dreamy, but intent and fixed, like that of one who has found some thought to grasp and contend with. He said not a word, but walked to the desk, took up the paper he had written on a little while before, and tore it to pieces. This done, he walked out.

Monsieur Morel looked after him, and soon heard him riding away. He shook his head, and smiled. "They have quarrelled," he said.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE PICTURE.

SWIFT and wild as a bird who has escaped from its cage into air and liberty, Adèle ran on until she reached the orchard. There she paused breathless, and sank down in the grass. She heeded not her dress of silk; she cared not for the cold; she only wanted to forget, to annihilate, the last few weeks, and be again what she had been.

She lay down, and clasped her hands above her head; but alas! the grass was dewy and chill, the trees were bare, the sky was wild, the birds sang no more, and silent, silent as death was her sad heart. Oh, to be a careless child again, to cross the fatal threshold that divides the girl from the woman, and, looking at the blue sky, listening to the blackbird's song, to sing old ballads, and dream how "the world was coming—coming fast!"

Tears rushed to her eyes, her heart swelled, she broke into passionate sobs. "I was so happy," she thought; "I had not a thought—not a care—not one—and now!" Her moans rose and mingled with the wind that swept above her. She was little more than a child—like a child she wept. He whose presence had given her strength to suffer in silence was gone—gone with that fond, watchful eye she could not escape; she could cry and lament to her heart's content; no more need she stifle her tears lest they should waken him from his calm sleep by her side. No more need she smile and laugh lest he should wonder why she sighed with her hand clasped in his. Her tears flowed until they could flow no more—until her heavy eyes closed, and her sobs were stilled in mute grief, until gathering gloom fell around her. Then she rose; torpid, cold, and slow she re-entered the house. She went up to her room; a lighted lamp stood on the table; her work, her book, were by it; but Adèle sat down on a low couch, and looked at the fire dying slowly on the hearth. With fixed, apathetic gaze, with hands listlessly clasped on her knees, she looked at it; and thus she sat hours.

At eleven the door opened: Jeannette stood before her mistress.

Adèle rose with a sudden spring, as if she were facing an enemy. Sadly and gravely Jeannette returned the glance of her mistress.

"Madame, I must speak to you," she said.

"Speak!" haughtily replied Adèle, "but mind what you say."

Jeannette burst into a passion of tears, and clasped her trembling hands.

"Oh, Madame!" she cried, "do, for Heaven's sake, Madame, do love your husband."

Adèle bit her lip, reddened, turned up her eyes, and finally looked down, and laughed frankly.

"Jeannette," she said, sinking back into her reclining attitude, and stretching out her little white hand towards the old woman, "sit down by me, and do not be foolish."

She spoke with all her old gaiety and lightness. Jeannette looked bewildered at the sudden change, but she obeyed. She sat down on the edge of the couch, and looked doubtfully at Adèle, who only laughed again, and seemed very much amused.

"What have you been dreaming of?" she asked, "that you walk in, and tell me to love Monsieur Osborne in that strange, oracular way? Love him! why you know I adore him! And if it were not that you have been dreaming, I should be quite angry with you."

"Madame, I did not dream what you said in the garden this day. Oh, you must love him more, or rather differently; and indeed, Madame, you ought. He is only a very little older than he might be; he is as good-looking a gentleman as one need wish for a husband."

"I never heard anything like it!" angrily interrupted Adèle. "What do you mean? Why, my husband is quite a young man! Good-looking, indeed! why he is remarkably handsome!—twice as handsome as I am; twice as good, and twice as everything! What amazes me is why and how he became fond of me. I am pretty, to be sure; but there are so many pretty girls! Why did he not fall in love with that beautiful Italian lady whose sketch he showed me the other day? She was rich, well born, his friend; and, oh, Jeannette, a daisy in the grass might as well vie with the lily on its stem, as I with her. Why did his eye rest—why did his fancy fall—on a poor, careless, little thing like me? That is what ought to amaze you as it amazes me, old Jeannette!"

She spoke softly now; and to atone for her previous sharpness, she gently stroked the old woman's brown hand. But Jeannette's amazement did not take the direction into which her mistress seemed to wish to lead it.

"In Heaven's name, Madame," she said, with some emotion; "why then did you wish yourself dead this morning?"

"Because I did then—because I do nine times a day—because it makes me mad to be married—because I feel fettered like one that is bound hand and foot—stifled like one that has not air to breathe; and when I feel it too strongly, oh! then I must wish for any release—even for that of death!"

She spoke with such feverish passion, such a captive-like longing for liberty passed over her pale face, that Jeannette was startled and frightened at its intensity.

"Oh! Mademoiselle!" she cried, distressed; "what have you done?"

"Yes," replied Adèle, with sad carelessness; "I have been a foolish bird; I was as merry as a lark; I sang from morning until night, and I was free. He had only to whistle for me and I came at once, glad to be caught. And because I liked him, I thought I should not care to have my wings clipped, and that I could still sing in a cage. And now, I cannot. Oh! I cannot—I can only pine and moan for my lost liberty. And yet—and yet——" she added, with a smile at her own waywardness, "I do believe I would do it all again if it were to be done. Oh, Jeannette, I do love him so much, he is so good, so admirable—so handsome!" she added, giving her old friend a mischievous look.

"And so fond of Madame!" put in Jeannette, with a nod.

"Yes—yes," impatiently sighed Adèle; "but I do love him, only," she added, with a moan, "why did he marry me? friends love, but do not marry."

"But, Mademoiselle, why did *you* marry him?" not unreasonably asked Jeannette.

"How tiresome you are!" said Adèle, looking provoked; "what foolish questions you do put, old Jeannette! Ask the wind why it blows; ask a bird why it sings; ask a child why it laughs and cries in a breath, and when they have answered you fairly, ask me why I do this or do that. I know nothing about it. I have always done what I liked, laughed when I was merry, cried when I was sad, and never given a thought to the coming day, never asked myself shall I like to-night what I like this morning. Besides, it seemed a beautiful and a noble thing to be the wife of William Osborne. Say to a peasant girl, will you be queen, wear a crown, sit on a throne, rule a land, and never stir without a body-guard to attend you? She will clap her hands and cry, yes. Ah! how she will repent it! how she will wish

her crown were on a bush, and that her people had another ruler! How she will long to run bare-foot in the dew of the morning—how she will break her heart because she has lost liberty; liberty without which there is no blessing! Like her, I have been offered, and I have accepted, a kingdom and a crown; a good, an accomplished gentleman's heart. How happy I should be if I could but lie there, content to love my life away! Why am I so restless and so wild? Why is his fondness so delightful and yet so tormenting? It makes my heart beat and swell with tenderness and pride to be so much loved by him—the peasant girl is glad to be queen, you see,—and I would give worlds that he would let me be quiet and forget me. I am too young—I am too young."

The exclamation was uttered with a pathos that moved Jeannette's heart; but all she could say, was:

"Ah! Madame, why did you marry him?"

"How could I help it, when he asked me?"

"Indeed, Madame, you found the means of saying your god-mother nay."

"Had she ever given a kind look, a smile, a pleasant word! And he! had he not from the first been as pleasant as the pleasant wind that blows from the west. Have you been fond of your young master, and do you not know that one must ever put oneself at the feet of what one loves?"

"Madame, Madame, what are you saying? If I could have been my young master's wife—it was impossible—but if I could have been his wife, how I would have sickened at the thought of death!"

"I am not very sure that I do really wish to die," honestly said Adèle.

"Ah! but how I would have prayed for longer days to spend with him, how I would have wished that the years might have no ending. Oh! do not laugh, Madame, do not. Think how dreadful a thing it is to wish undone that which God himself has done: it is like flying in the face of the Almighty."

Adèle became crimson, and her eyes sparkled angrily. "And who told you that I wished it undone?" she asked. "I may wish that it had not been done; that he liked some one else; but what is—is. I am his wife, he is my husband. It is done for ever and for ever. How could you construe so harshly a few hasty words? I am young, only sixteen. I have always had my own way; I have never suffered; and if this new pain draws a cry from me, do not mind it. It will pass away: there is a

very sweet drop in all this bitterness ; he is fond of me—I do not deserve it—I am a perverse, naughty child, and an ingrate too, but he is fond of me. I am a little wild still, but he is so gentle and so kind, that he will tame me and make me good like himself in time. Wish it undone ! It would be a sin—it would be a folly. I do not—I do not.”

She was obstinate and indignant now ; but her eye was sad, her haughty smile made Jeannette’s heart ache.

“ And you will try and love him,” she said ; “ you can if you like, Madame ; and if you will but let me undress you, I will, when you are in bed, tell you a story that will show you how one need not marry for love in order to fall in love with one’s husband.”

Adèle smiled a little sadly, but out of very weariness she submitted. In a few minutes her head was resting on her pillow, and Jeannette, sitting at the foot of the bed, began her narrative.

“ My young master’s wife had an old nurse who had reared her as I have reared Mademoiselle. Her name was Goton ; she was fond of her mistress and fond of me too ; and once—that was the very year before she died—she told me what I could not have known but for her, the story of my young master’s marriage. He once went to see his aunt, who was an abbess in a convent, and whilst he was talking to her at the grating, Mademoiselle de Lenart—that was her name—crossed the parlour. He fell in love with her that very moment ; the next day he asked her in marriage, and within a week he married her. Well, he had brought her home, and she was resting for a moment in a little saloon that had been fitted up for that purpose, and he was looking at her as pleased as pleased could be, when all at once she turned round, and in the hearing of her old nurse she said to him, ‘ Sir, I have married you, but remember that you have never asked me if I liked you.’ Poor gentleman ! how was he to ask her when he had never been left two minutes alone with her ? ‘ And now,’ added the little lady, quite angrily, ‘ I warn you, that I do not like you, and that I never shall like you.’ Well, that was a sad speech for a poor young husband in love to hear on his wedding day. Goton said that he staggered and turned quite white ; then he sank down on one knee before his wife and laid his hand on his heart. Ah ! in those days men knew how to love, and he said, ‘ Madame, would to Heaven that I could give you back the freedom of which I have robbed you ; but since I cannot do that, I will do the only thing in my power, I will either make you love

me'—here Goton said she looked quite scornful at him—'or I will die,' he added, sighing, as if his heart were going to break; and Goton declared he seemed ready to expire with grief, but so handsome with it all, that he looked more like an angel than like a man. Well, his little wife had a hot temper and a warm heart; she softened, and said that with time she might like him a little, but not yet nor in the way of love. Ah, well, my young master was a good gentleman, but he was in love, and lovers are full of tricks. Instead of being comforted, he became like one mad, laid his hand on the hilt of his sword, and wanted to rush out to kill himself. Poor child! she was fifteen, and knew nothing of men; she caught hold of his coat, and vowed, quite frightened, that she already liked him more. But though he turned back, he said it was only her angelic goodness made her speak so, that he knew she did not, and never could love him; that he was a wretch who had deprived her of liberty and happiness, and that the only thing for them both was, that he should die, make her mistress of all he possessed, and leave her free to bless a happier man. On hearing that she cried as if her heart would break, but he only got on worse. 'All he wanted,' he said, 'was to kiss her hand once before he died.' Well, well, if men are odd, women are odd too; and I cannot help thinking that if some one has got my young master's eyes, some one also has got some of my young master's wife's temper and ways. Instead of giving him her hand to kiss, she threw her arms around his neck, and kissed him quite fondly, and said he was not to die on any account, but to live, for that she loved him and only him, and would not be the wife of any one else for all the world held. When he had got her to that point, there he kept her, you may be sure, not merely for that day, but for ever afterwards; yet there was no need. Madame told Goton later that she had really fallen in love with him when he first knelt down looking so handsome and so unhappy. And fond enough of him she was, and a little jealous, too, though without cause. But he was a handsome man, and gallant with women, who all liked him; and I think it was on account of a certain great beauty who lived hard by, and to tease him, that she let the Marquis kiss her hand in the play; and what does all that prove?" added Jeannette, breaking off, "why, that a woman can fall in love with her husband if she chooses."

But she waited in vain for Adèle to dispute the axiom: Adèle was fast asleep.

"Youth is youth, after all," thought Jeannette, sighing; "it will sleep, eat, and drink, no matter what comes."

But Jeannette did not sleep that night. She sat and watched by the bed of Mr. Osborne's wife until dawn; she felt dismayed and distracted. The lightness of Adèle did not deceive her. She knew it was the young girl's temper to pass suddenly from mood to mood, and that, brave by nature, she could smile and defy sorrow with heroic carelessness. Adèle was sleeping like a child now, as peaceful, as pretty in her slumbers as childhood and innocence, but Jeannette saw the thunder-cloud still lurking in that serene sky, and she lamented to think it must break some day. Who that, seeing and hearing this young bride with her husband, would not have thought her the fondest of wives and happiest of women? And she was wishing herself dead all the time—all the time her passionate young heart was in revolt, and her being in insurrection.

"And she is of old blood, of wild blood," thought Jeannette, groaning inwardly, "of a race where the men were fierce and the women uncontrollable. She is fond of him in her own way, but well as she likes him, and much as he loves her, the little thing will yet do something desperate and strange, if it were only to show that she is one of the great and wicked old De Courcelles. God bless her, poor darling! poor lamb! it is no fault of hers, they have all been so."

Are the theories of race a dream? Do the pride of the tyrant and the broken spirit of the slave go down from father to son?—a fatal inheritance. Adèle was fond and tender like a girl, a gay democrat of sixteen, too, a derider of the past, a careless lover of the present, but thirty generations of imperious women and men, who never owned a law save that of their own wild will, had not transmitted her their blood in vain. She could not submit, she could not obey. Her lonely, unloved, unfettered youth, which had given her the delightful wildness, the fresh, original grace that had fascinated Mr. Osborne, had helped her natural temper but too well. She had never known control, she had learned to care about nothing and no one, and she had grown up in the convenient doctrine that whatever she pleased to do was right. She was pure in thought and deed, gentle in the main, easily pleased, very easily made happy. Jeannette's old stories to laugh at, the old house and garden to run in, the dreams of youth to charm her idle hours were sufficient, until Mr. Osborne suddenly broke on her solitude.

At once she conceived a sort of passion for him—the passion which girls feel for the first superior man or woman they fall in with, the fervent enthusiasm of a neophyte for a beloved teacher,

the blind devotedness of a partisan for a chief, but not love, not even friendship, for it does not assume equality as possible, and looks up to no return. Adèle did not dream that Mr. Osborne could love her, not even that he could care much about her. Why should he? He so perfect, she so insignificant. The proofs of liking he gave her touched her deeply; his offer of marriage frightened her a little, but dazzled her a great deal more. It was, as she had said, being offered a crown; too glorious a destiny to be rejected. The suddenness of their marriage gave her little time to think. Pride, wilfulness, a natural loyalty that shrank from the breaking of a promise, would not let her heed Mademoiselle de Janson's warnings or retract. It pleased him to have her, it pleased her to marry him, and she would marry him, *quand même*. She did. She had her will, and she found that though it did not please her to be the wife even of Mr. Osborne, the deed could not be undone. And this bond which she could not break, this yoke which she must bear, stung her, until there were moments when she felt that she must break into open revolt or die. Love, indeed, can rule the proudest hearts and tame the wildest tempers; but Adèle was too young for love, for passion, for marriage; too young for anything but the careless liberty of a careless girl. Her enthusiastic affection might look enough like love to deceive them both, but it was not it at all; it was not, moreover, the feeling that makes a happy marriage.

Worship implies distance; we kneel and look up to adore; but love is equality; it gives and receives; it feeds on the exchange of two beings and two hearts. Mr. Osborne could only smile, and be amused at his wife's fond admiration of his perfections; it could not satisfy him; he wanted to love her and be loved; not to sit the calm, unmoved Jove of a domestic Olympus, breathing in incense. He wanted to love and be loved; natural desire, that proved the source of all her woe.

And far more bitter than she had hinted to Jeannette had been her brief married life to Adèle. Her husband had prepared her for a life calm though happy, for an affection serene though deep, and instead of that, he had borne her into a region of passion and exacting fondness, which she had never, even in thought, conceived, which she was too young and too careless to like, too ignorant to understand. Why was she to be for ever chained to his side? Why was she to be made to feel, from morning till night, that she was lovely in his sight—delightful to his heart? Was this enamoured lover the kind and calm Mr. Osborne? Was this fond husband the reserved gentleman who

once read and talked with his little friend, and who now had but one endless tale to tell to his young wife? With secret irritation, with secret woe, she submitted to a tenderness she had no right to repel, to a love which she had accepted for once and for ever; but she suffered keenly and strangely. The struggle became intolerable; her health failed, her sleep fled, languor and fever consumed her. With the words of Docteur Guillaume, a glimpse of the truth flashed across Mr. Osborne's mind on the evening of their return; he saw it in one glance; she did not like him; but the next moment his faith returned. How could he doubt her reply to his question—"Next to God?" Did not her words, her looks, her caresses, breathe affection and fondness?

Alas! there was the mischief. She could speak so, she could be that, and not lie. She could delude, and yet not deceive him. She did love him with her whole heart. It was the worst of her lot that she admired him infinitely, that she was tenderly proud, and more tenderly fond, of her husband. There were even provoking moments when an irresistible impulse sent her to his side playful and caressing. There were times when she wondered what imperfection of her nature prevented her from being in love with that perfect man, when, half through vexation at her folly, half because it pleased her to be fond, she overwhelmed him with a sudden tenderness of which he did not guess the fitful nature, of which he only felt the enchanting sweetness. And when she had succeeded but too well in rousing an affection that never slumbered long, when these wayward ways, these girlish caprices, these alternatives of coolness and fondness that irritate a man, but charm even more than they provoke him, had made Mr. Osborne rather fonder of his wife than he was before, Adèle relapsed into sullen misery, and passionately wished herself dead.

It was wrong—it was very wrong indeed; she ought, having committed a sad mistake, to have borne it meekly and patiently; but there is something in the plea she offered up for herself: she was young, very young, and she had never suffered.

CHAPTER XXXI.

AN ARRIVAL.

EARLY the next morning, Jeannette sought and found a favourable opportunity to address some more words of good counsel to her mistress. She had discovered a stock of such clear, convincing, irresistible arguments, that if Adèle did not put them to profit, the fault was surely her own, and not Jeannette's.

Adèle was sitting by the open door of the conservatory; the morning sun shone on her bare head; her cheek was resting on her hand; her eyes were fixed on the statue at the end of the alley; she had a pale but resolute look. Scarcely had Jeannette begun, scarcely had she opened her mouth, when the hand of her young mistress was laid on her lips.

"We have spoken for the first and last time on that subject," she observed, in a decisive tone. "I was foolish yesterday; I scarcely knew what I said; all nonsense at which I laugh to-day. All I know is this—I am the wife of a good, handsome, and rich gentleman, who loves me, and whom I am fond of; and I am the happiest of women."

She spoke gaily, kindly, but in a tone that admitted of no reply.

In vain Jeannette looked at her wistfully; the eyes of Adèle remained inexorable, though smiling; Mr. Osborne was to be spoken of no more.

"Send me Lilian," she resumed, "I feel very lonely this morning."

"There is no making her out," thought Jeannette, bewildered; "when you think you have her, she slips through your fingers. I suppose she wants him back now?"

Perhaps she did; perhaps his absence was a pain different from the pain of his presence, but as keen. In a few minutes Jeannette returned, bringing Lilian through the conservatory.

"Mademoiselle, you must not run here," began Jeannette.

Vain remonstrance! Lilian had seen her young stepmother, and, dropping Jeannette's hand, she had bounded towards her joyously. Adèle received her fondly. She took Lilian on her knee; she clasped her arms around Mr. Osborne's child; she kissed her again and again; and Jeannette, who was lingering in the conservatory, heard Lilian saying—

"Why are you crying? You are not going away, are you?"

"Oh, no! but he is not here, Lilian, he is not here."

Jeannette heard no more. Adèle rose, took Lilian by the hand, and ran down the alley with her. Lilian laughed, and Adèle echoed the laugh very gaily. The day was fine, and they spent the morning out together in the garden. Jeannette, who lingered uneasily about, met them several times. The cheek of Lilian was not more blooming than that of Adèle; her eyes laughed with enjoyment; she looked gay and happy. "Because he is away," thought Jeannette, not pleased with the change.

She was meditating over it that same evening, sitting alone in her favourite room, when Jean made his appearance.

"Mademoiselle Jeannette," he said, "will you go and try and comfort Madame a little? She is sitting alone in the Hall, white as death, and looking so wretched! It made my heart ache to see the tender little thing fretting thus for her husband. It is very natural, you know."

"Oh! what fools men are!" internally muttered Jeannette "Fretting for her husband, of course! pray what took him away at this time, when she should not have a moment to breathe like? He is mad; they are all mad and blind. Blind! Ay, a mole has sharper eyes than a man."

Nevertheless she rose, left her wheel, went to the Hall, opened the door, and looking in, asked if Madame wanted her.

Adèle sat on a low chair, leaning back doing nothing, looking at the fire listlessly, like one whose soul and being Apathy has invaded. Without turning round, or moving ever so slightly, she replied:

"I want nothing, Jeannette, thank you."

"Fretting for her husband or because she has a husband," thought Jeannette, closing the door.

She had risen brave and resolute in the morning, determined to battle with the foe, for she had a strong though childish heart, and not to be conquered without a struggle; but already the reaction had come, already defeat had overtaken her. A little while she had forgotten her bitter lot; for a few hours she had been a child, a girl again; but, with the absence of Lilian, now fast asleep upstairs, with the solitude of the old Hall, memory had returned, and with memory misery. It is good for us all to suffer; that distasteful medicine works well: it is indeed the salt of the earth, the bitter brine in which humanity must needs be steeped to live. But it is very hard to bear. Adèle sank under the burden. The whole of the next day she surrendered herself to repining unspoken but deep. Like Job, she lamented

over herself and her lot, and pined, "that she might rest, until her wished-for day should come, as that of the hireling."

Anxiously, though silently, Jeannette watched her mistress, and saw her growing sadder as the day wore, from which Jean perceived that Madame's fretting increased with Monsieur's absence. Jeannette turned up her eyes and muttered audibly:

"Oh! what fools men are."

"Hein!" echoed Jean, surprised.

"I say," resumed Jeannette, stoutly, "that men are fools."

Jean, who was standing by the open door of her little room—it was a well understood rule that he was neither to sit down nor to come too near—indeed, he had only called in to make a polite inquiry concerning the state of Mademoiselle Jeannette's health—Jean, we say, gave the lady of his thoughts a doubtful look; as much as to say, "Is that for me, or how am I to take it?"

"Why did he not stay at home, or take her with him?" asked Jeannette.

"Because of the weather, I suppose," answered Jean.

"He did not do it because men are fools," resolutely interrupted Jeannette, "because—" she proceeded no further; a sound of carriage-wheels stopping at the gate of the Manor gave another current to her thoughts. She started up and clasped her hands.

"Thank God, he is come back," she said, and almost upsetting her wheel in her eagerness, she hurried out of the room, before Jean well knew what she was about.

"What a flighty thing she always has been!" he said half audibly, "and will be to the end of time," he continued, leaving the room with leisurely step to go and wait his master's orders.

But it was not Mr. Osborne. No male voice had greeted Jeannette's ear when she opened the door. To her surprise and her dismay too, Mrs. Osborne and her two daughters had alighted from a travelling-carriage, and entered the Manor. They came, too, not for a day, but with an unmistakeable array of trunks and luggage, that intimated in plain speech, "We are here for the winter."

"Oh! my poor little mistress!" thought Jeannette, "my poor darling, your troubles are only beginning."

But Jeannette had, as she said herself, the spirit of a lion, and at once she put on a brave front and met the enemy. She threw open the door of the old Hall, and in a clear voice announced—

"Madame and Mesdemoiselles Osborne."

But, though a bright fire burned on the hearth, though the lamp stood lit on the table, the chair of Adèle was vacant; the Hall was empty. To that chair Anna at once found her way, and she sank down in it without further troubling herself about the present. Isabella walked up to the fire, and slightly shivering warmed her hands; with a wearied air, Mrs. Osborne unfastened her cloak, and looking over her shoulder, she said to Jeannette, who stood waiting in the background :

"Where is Monsieur?"

"Monsieur is not at home."

"Has he long been gone?"

But before Jeannette could answer the question, Isabella, taking up a half embroidered handkerchief from the chimney, had sharply asked,—

"Whose work is that?"

Jeannette dilated with triumph. A wicked light shone in her brown eye, still clear and bright like that of a bird, her lip took a sarcastic curl, and in the meekest of meek voices she demurely answered,—

"It is the work of Madame."

A deep, an awful stillness filled the room. Anna opened her eyes amazed, Isabella drew herself up indignantly; the calm, dispassionate Mrs. Osborne bit her lip and forced an unnatural smile; then a significant look went round; Mr. Osborne was married.

Jeannette enjoyed it for awhile, then said,—

"I shall go and tell Madame that you are come."

She got no answer, and withdrew. The door closed upon her, yet the storm did not break forth at once. Mrs. Osborne began. She raised her handkerchief to her eyes, and sighed.

"I did not think my son William would have chosen this moment, when the whole of his helpless and innocent family are on the brink of ruin, to take a wife."

"So selfish of him," moaned Anna, shutting her eyes; "what could make him do it?"

"Love," said Isabella, sneering. "What a pretty pattern," she added, looking over the handkerchief; "I suppose he drew it for her."

"I hope it is not that girl," said Anna, crossly; "I shall hate her, you know."

"Whoever she may be," again sighed Mrs. Osborne, but this time withdrawing her handkerchief, "we must forget our personal feelings, to remember that she is William's wife, my daughter, and your sister."

"I shall detest her—I detest her already," cried Anna, with something like energy; "I do not like William, he is selfish and bad-tempered; why should I like his wife?"

"Anna, you amaze me!" said Mrs. Osborne, virtuously; "do you call yourself a Christian, with such feelings in your heart?"

But before Anna could answer this delicate question, Mrs. Osborne had turned sharply on her elder daughter, and in a voice tremulous with emotion, she had asked what she meant by uttering the vulgar and insolent word of humbug?

"Because it is humbug, there!" recklessly exclaimed Isabella; "I declare I can stand it no longer, it makes me sick. You know you are mad that William is married; you know you dislike that girl more than Anna does; you know it exasperates you to find a little thing who can rule you and us like so many children; tell us when we are to dine, whom we are to see, and how much we are to spend, too; you know you hate it, and so do I, so far as that goes, and yet you go on talking about daughters, and sisters, and Christian feelings. I say again it is humbug, and that I hate humbug."

Mrs. Osborne never lost her temper, but then the fair Isabella had never spoken so plainly before; and Mrs. Osborne's equanimity, already sorely disturbed at finding a wife, that most potent of domestic rulers, established and seated in her little throne of household authority, could not resist the mixture of frankness and insolence that characterized her daughter's speech. Pale and wrathful, and with kindling eyes and white lips, she turned on and walked up to Isabella, who waited boldly. But no domestic scene, no angry quarrel, was to divide the little band already conjured against the unknown enemy.

Mrs. Osborne's brow cleared; her blue eye softened; the smile returned to her lip; the calm, ladylike grace to her bearing. She had heard a light step without; the rustling of a silk robe had reached her quick ear. Amiable, sweet as honey, maternal, and dignified, breathing welcome, she turned towards the door, as it opened and admitted Mr. Osborne's wife.

In all haste Jeannette had run up to the room of Adèle, but Adèle was not there, and Madame Leroy knew nothing of her mistress. She said as much with an air that implied that it was her business to dress Madame Osborne, and not to be acquainted with her movements.

"That woman is almost as great a fool as if she were a man," muttered Jeannette, impatiently. "Surely," she added, looking out on the dark night, "she cannot be out at this hour." But it was

not impossible; and spite the cold, Jeannette ventured out in the garden, and unceremoniously called out—

"Madame, you are wanted."

But Adèle did not answer. Where could she be? Jeannette was revolving the question in her mind, when a light in Mr. Osborne's study caught her eye; at once she guessed the truth; Adèle was there. She went up the flight of stone steps, and through the closed glass door she saw her mistress. Adèle sat in her husband's chair; her head lay on his table still covered with papers, and her arms were folded above it. Twice Jeannette knocked before her mistress looked up, and when she did do so, the old woman saw that her face was bathed in tears; but she did not seem conscious of them. In a calm voice she said—

"Come in, Jeannette;" and as calmly, when Jeannette had entered, she asked—"What is it?—what do you want?"

"Ah, Madame, you are crying!"

"Ay, Jeannette, and I shall cry more until he comes back. Would you believe it?—I never asked where he was going. I do not know it; no one knows it. I have been to ask Monsieur Morel in the counting-house, and he does not know it. Oh, I shall be wretched until I see him again."

"Well, Madame, take an old woman's advice; be strong and courageous; for I am come to tell you."

Adèle sprang towards her, ashy pale.

"Is he dead?" she asked.

"God bless us, no! Monsieur is well, I hope."

"But something has happened to him," cried Adèle; "what is it? tell me—tell me!"

"On my word, Madame, I know nothing good or bad of Monsieur."

The colour of Adèle returned; but she bit her lip, and looked half angry.

"There never was anything like it," she exclaimed. "There is that Monsieur Morel, who keeps moaning over to me that my husband leaves his pistols at home, that the roads are not safe, until I feel that I should like to dip *him* in the lake! And then you must needs come, bearing evil tidings in your very looks, to make me lose my temper, just when I have resolved to be an angel of meekness by the time he comes back. You are all very tiresome. I want to be good, and you will not let me."

She spake rather petulantly for a would-be angel; but, without heeding this, Jeannette resumed:

"Be courageous, Madame; Madame Osborne and her two daughters are come."

"With him?"

"No, Madame, alone. Ah! be strong and firm; young as you are, you are the mistress of the house, Monsieur's wife—do not from mere goodness, do not let yourself be trampled upon. They will be three against you, and he is away; but if you will only be firm and strong, all will be well; and if you let yourself be trampled upon, all will be undone. They will take everything from you—they will begin with the keys of the cupboard, and they will end with Monsieur."

Adèle laughed until her eyes sparkled.

"I defy them," she said, gaily; "the keys are here," she added, jingling them in her right-hand apron pocket; "and Monsieur is there," she continued, touching the wedding-ring on her left hand.

"Ay, Madame, I know that, but do not let yourself be trampled upon. I know what mothers and sisters are to step-daughters and sisters-in-law."

"Hush! Jeannette!" interrupted Adèle, firmly, but good-humouredly, "you are dreaming. There will be no trampling and no resisting, and all I have to do now, is to go and bid them welcome."

"Time will show," muttered Jeannette, turning up her eyes; "time will show!" But, without heeding her, Adèle gave her a few rapid orders, and left her room.

Yet her heart beat a little as she approached the door of the Hall; she opened it boldly, then half-shyly paused on the threshold, and the pause gave the three ladies time to recognize her. Ay, it was Adèle. The light of the lamp fell on her flushed face, the gloom of the staircase behind as she stood with the half-open door still in her hand, gave double vividness to the distinct outlines of her young and graceful figure. Her hair was bound in the fashion of the day, with three velvet bands, blue to suit the silk dress of the same colour, dark enough for the season, and light enough to show at night, which fell around her in rich and ample folds. A little black silk apron, gaily embroidered in flowers of every hue, gave it a careless household grace. Jewels or ornaments she wore none, save a light gold chain that glittered around her neck, and fell down to her waist, but her collar and lace sleeves were thin and delicate as a cobweb, and, as in her half-bending forward attitude, her little foot peeped out from underneath the edge of her dress, feminine eyes could plainly see that her velvet slipper was trimmed with fur, and what fur, good heavens! sable, real sable.

"He is mad!" indignantly thought Isabella, measuring Mr. Osborne's love from his generosity. And she detested Adèle from that moment. He was her brother, and she could not have him; but what right had another woman to take him away?

Adèle came forward. She looked at Anna, who did not leave her chair, at Isabella, who seemed to have grown into the marble of the mantelpiece, and she saw but one friendly face, that of her handsome mother-in-law, who graciously came towards her, laid her hand on hers, and bending kissed her cheek.

"My dear child," she said, "do not wonder at a little surprise. We did not know that William had given me a daughter and my children a sister. I wish you joy with all my heart; but I shall scold William."

Adèle looked up and smiled. "Monsieur Osborne is so forgetful," she said.

"But there are things that should not be forgotten," persisted Mrs. Osborne, with a little dignity.

"He is so forgetful!" said Adèle, again; "he never thought of telling me you were coming, and thus you will, I am afraid, find this first evening rather uncomfortable; but I shall do my best. I have already ordered fires in all your rooms, and dinner will come up presently. Would you like to rest first?—shall Madame Leroy help you to unpack? you have had bad weather?—how tired you must be!"

She spoke with a quiet ease, that made Mrs. Osborne drop the dignified at once. But with alarm, that careful lady saw that her two daughters had preserved their rigid attitude. In vain she coughed and looked. Adèle was ignored.

"Oh!" "we are indeed dreadfully tired," she said; "the most awful weather, bad horses; it was dreadful. And I think that we will, if you will allow it, retire for a while. Anna, my dear, Isabella, my love, are you coming?"

But it did not suit those two young ladies to obey. Anna crossly replied that she did not like cold rooms, and Isabella, triumphantly surveying her blooming beauty in the glass, said she was never tired.

"They are a pair of incorrigible fools," thought Mrs. Osborne, with some contempt. "I should be mad, truly, to sacrifice myself for them."

William's wife was the side of strength, and to that side Mrs. Osborne would adhere. With an increase of tenderness, she pressed her daughter-in-law's hand, and confidentially whispering that she was sinking with fatigue, she left the room. Adèle re-

mained alone with her two sisters-in-law. She thought them cold and strange; but they were her husband's sisters, and she felt friendly towards them. She approached the fireplace, and looking up at Isabella, she said simply:

"I am glad to see you," and she held out her hand.

Coldly and ungraciously Isabella held out hers; but not one word did she speak.

"I hope she will not attempt to shake hands with me!" moaned Anna, with a shudder; "it would make my flesh creep, you know."

She spoke in English; Adèle did not understand the words, but she heard the moan, she saw the shiver. "Ah! poor thing," she thought, "how ill she is!" And going up to her with sudden interest, she softly asked how she felt.

"So cold!" moaned Anna.

"You are not covered enough," promptly and decisively said Adèle.

"Of course not,—I said so; but they are so selfish."

Adèle tapped her forehead, and was struck with a brilliant thought.

"Wait awhile," she said, "wait awhile;" and she darted out of the room.

"What a ridiculous little thing it is," said Isabella, with a scornful smile.

"I do not think she is so very ridiculous," shortly said Anna; "she saw I was cold, as any one could see it, and she is gone to fetch something to keep me warm."

"I wish you joy of your sister-in-law," cried Isabella, with a sneer, "and I leave her to you, and you to her. It would make me sick."

And with a sweep of her robes Isabella walked out. She was scarcely gone when Adèle appeared, bearing a rich fur cape, which Madame de Brievue had put into the corbeille. She opened it, and holding it up for Anna's gaze, asked if that would keep her warm. Anna thought it would.

"But you will want it back again," she said, a little crossly. About its value she did not care a pin, but it looked comfortable, and Anna gave it a longing eye.

"I shall only be too well pleased if you will keep it," promptly said Adèle; "let me put it on you."

Anna offered no resistance; the fur cape seemed to have been made for her, it sat so well. She sunk back in her chair, and already felt warmer.

"I am so glad," said Adèle, "but what have you got under your feet?—Nothing—here is my stool."

Anna condescended to accept it, and with the free warm zeal of youth, Adèle placed the stool under her feet. Anna looked down at her. Adèle was kneeling on the rug before her, and she looked up in her sister-in-law's face with a look so clear, a smile so friendly, and a whole aspect so blooming and gay, that Anna, already much mollified, was thoroughly won. For the first time she found one who really believed that she was cold, and who acted on the belief.

"I like you," she said; "and I am glad William has married you. I am sure you will make me comfortable."

"Oh, yes, I will," cried Adèle, eagerly; "only tell me what I am to do."

"I must be kept very warm," said Anna, "and comfortable, and I must be attended to."

"Will you have my maid, Madame Leroy?"

Anna thought she would not mind, but intimated pretty clearly that Madame Leroy must be like the fur cape, a long loan. Adèle gaily replied that it should be as she wished, and finished her conquest by discovering that Anna's chair was too far away from the fire, and wheeling it a little nearer.

"I like that chair; whose is it?" asked Anna.

"Yours," promptly replied Adèle.

"I feel very comfortable," murmured Anna, closing her eyes.

"I am so glad!" exclaimed Adèle, delighted.

The door opened, and Mrs. Osborne entered. She heard the friendly words uttered in the friendly tone. She saw Anna in the fur cape and Adèle standing by her. At once the clear-sighted lady also saw which way to steer for the present. She went up to Anna's chair, and leaning over it, she looked across at Adèle, and gently and sadly shook her head.

"She is so delicate," she said, "I live in fear."

Adèle nodded sagaciously; then inclining her head towards her right shoulder, she looked thoughtful and compassionate. Isabella, who had followed her mother in, closed the door, and gave the three a haughty, disdainful look.

"How deceitful they all three are," she thought, with curling lip; "they hate and they fondle. I alone am true; I hate, and I show it. How I detest women and their ways. Why am I not a man?"

Poor Isabella! little she knew that she was more woman in

her faults, less man in her virtues, than any of the three at whom she looked with such sweeping scorn. Mrs. Osborne was dispassionate; Anna had never made herself uncomfortable with envy of another woman's beauty; Adèle was generous as a princess. And truth compels us to declare that number one was, and had ever been, the first object of the fair Isabella's thoughts; her prejudices, too, were like her passions, blind and strong, and, would we need not add it, Isabella hated a pretty woman.

CHAPTER XXXII.

MR. OSBORNE'S FAMILY.

THE wind was keen, and Miss Osborne walked briskly down the garden. She gathered up her ample skirts as she stepped along, for it had been raining; and Isabella Osborne, though reckless of many things, was not unfemininely reckless of earth-stained garments; but she looked neither right nor left; she walked on, indeed, like one who had an object.

An object she certainly had. She reached the end of the garden; she opened the door that led to the counting-house, crossed an iron bridge that now spanned the stream, and she had entered the office before Monsieur Morel, who had seen her stepping like a nymph from beneath the low garden door, had had time to wonder where Mademoiselle Isabella could be going on that bleak day at that late hour. She now stood before him in all her stately beauty.

Miss Osborne had freaks. Sometimes she was a mediæval lady; she then wore her hair in low bands, had a robe of extraordinary make, and displayed a morocco pouch and a massive chatelaine in its folds. Sometimes she appeared in ample skirts all but hooped, with low bodies, wasp-like waists, and frizzed hair. On this day she was in the Diana Vernon mood; her dark cloth dress was made like a riding-habit, tight-fitting and buttoned up; her hair was parted on one side like a man's, and in her hand she held a long, slender wand, which she had found in the garden; and being a fine woman, and a handsome girl, she looked very well.

But the effect her looks might produce was for once Isabella's

least thought. She gave a rapid look around the room ; it was a dull and dingy place ; the blank glass windows, the strongly-bound and brass clasped books on their shelves, the spare, bending figure of the sallow foreman at his desk, made her proud and handsome lip curl. Business was a fine thing, for it gave money ; but how could money, the creator of luxury and ease, come out of a place like this ?

Monsieur Morel looked round, and rose very slowly, without much deference or *empressement*. It was his habit to stoop low enough out of the counting-house, but in it he felt strong and cool. The beautiful Isabella wanted him, or she had not come ; and if she wanted him, why it was well to keep his advantage.

"You have got a letter of mine ?" she said, briefly.

Monsieur Morel shook his head slowly.

"Monsieur has not written since his departure," he said ; "Madame came again this morning, but I had the grief—"

"That is not it," interrupted Isabella, "you have my letter—I want it."

"I have no letter belonging to Mademoiselle," was the grave reply.

She gave him a keen look.

"None directed to you, for instance, and meant for me ?"

"None," he answered slowly. "I once had such a letter from an eminent commercial man, intended for a lady, and directed to me—a lady who had business with him ; but I perceived the mistake, and at once returned it half read."

"To the lady ?"

"To the gentleman. It was an offer of marriage, I believe, but I did not see the end."

Morel took up his pen as if he regretted losing so much time ; but Isabella did not move ; she looked at him fixedly ; her cheek was flushed ; her eye was sparkling.

"He wanted to marry Mademoiselle de Janson," she said, with a forced laugh.

Monsieur Morel smiled, but did not answer.

"Or my sister-in-law," she pursued, reckless of what she said.

"Or any other lady," replied Monsieur Morel, "for all I know." But he spoke like one who did know, and would not tell.

It might be all an invention ; but Isabella received it with avidity. Even as whatever dress she might wear, she was always the same violent, truthful, impulsive and selfish girl of the nineteenth century ; so, spite of experience, with her eyes open, with

contempt for every one's judgment save her own, Isabella was ever falling into some new trap, never taught and never cured.

"It does not matter much," she said, recovering a little; "I thought you had a letter of mine, and you have not; there is an end of it."

She walked out without deigning him another look, and did not condescend to shut the door behind her.

"Now, why should I not do as well as another man for her husband?" thought Monsieur Morel, watching her stately figure as she re-entered the garden. "She is handsomer than that little midge who is fretting herself pale for her husband, and is more haughty in her civility than this one in her rudeness. If she is not rich, she brings wealth in the skirt of her dress and the sole of her shoe; it clings to her. I feel, too, I have a natural liking for handsome, well-born, well-bred, well-dowered young ladies. They would laugh if they knew it. Many a one laughed at the great Napoleon, and bit her nails later, thinking—'I might have been an Empress.' As for that Baron, let him marry her if he dare. I forbid the banns!"

He resumed his writing. Isabella, too, indulged in soliloquy as she walked back through the garden. A half incredulous revulsion had come to her.

"So he wanted her," she thought; "he marry a penniless girl—never! The man (viz. M. F. Morel) is an idiot. William, indeed, can marry for love, but Augusta is made of other stuff."

Yet she re-entered the Hall in anything but a good temper. A family circle was gathered there; Mrs. Osborne was writing at the table, Anna was sleeping by the fire, Adèle sat on a low stool embroidering, and Lilian was playing on the floor by her side. The little girl looked up on hearing the door open; at once she mimicked the frown and ill-tempered look of her aunt; then she laughed saucily. Lilian was a spoiled child, used to her own way; she had, moreover, taken a singular dislike to her father's relatives: she received Mrs. Osborne's sweetness—for Lilian was a great heiress, as that prudent lady knew—with open impertinence, openly she laughed at Anna, and openly she detested her aunt Isabella, who had begun their acquaintance by calling her an ugly little monkey.

"Truly you rear William's child admirably," irefully said Isabella, perceiving the face Lilian had put on, and addressing Adèle.

"Oh, Lilian!" said Adèle, gently holding up her forefinger; but Lilian laughed, and threw her arms around the neck of Adèle,

who had not the heart to chide. Her absent husband seemed to be looking up at her from the face of his child. "Why are you so like him, if you will not be good like him?" she asked, tenderly.

Lilian kissed her, but expressed no penitence. She had already learned that Adèle belonged to her as well as to Mr. Osborne, that she might do as she pleased with her father's young wife. Unchecked, she now persisted in her caresses. Mrs. Osborne looked up from her letters with a smile, that meant, "How charming." Isabella, who stood by the window, looked disdainful. Everything annoyed and irritated her. She had written to the Baron to come, and he had not answered, and was not coming. Worse still, M. Morel had hinted at things she hated to think of.

"I wonder William does not write to you," she said sharply.

Adèle put Lilian away; she turned red and pale, her lip trembled.

"I hope he is not ill," she said.

"Ill! not he; he is simply the most careless fellow. He might be more attentive, though, considering the honeymoon is barely over."

Lilian had resumed her play; Adèle leaned her cheek on her hand, and fell into a dreary dream. Mr. Osborne had been gone a week. Why did he not write or come back? Oh! for the sound of his step on the stairs; for his friendly look and his friendly voice in that wide room where, save for his child playing near her, she would have felt so lonely.

The Baron had proved the pledge of a new alliance between Isabella and her mother. A few conversations with Adèle had convinced the sagacious lady that though she might be a fondly loved bride, yet she knew nothing of her husband's affairs, and the daughter-in-law had been at once sacrificed to the daughter. She was civil to Mr. Osborne's wife, of course, but why lose time and diplomacy with one who could not serve, and who seemed too good-natured to injure her? It would have been foolish, and unlike Charles the Second,—

"Who never said a foolish thing,
And never did a wise one."

Mrs. Osborne did not mind how many foolish speeches she made, provided she acted wisely. She now looked up from her letter, saw that Lilian had left the room, and quite sweetly, and in the English tongue, for it was not necessary that Adèle should under-

stand, she addressed her daughter, who still stood near the window with a frown on her fair brow.

"Isabella, my love, is he coming?"

"How can I tell," was the cross reply.

"I do so want him to come, I want to explain to him about the partnership before the arrival of W.—you know whom I mean."

"William, I suppose," perversely put in Isabella.

"My dear, why mention her husband's name? Well, W. is peculiar, and I doubt if our friend knows how to manage those peculiarities."

"I hope he would scorn to flatter William."

"My love, that is not it. We must manage W. or we can effect nothing. We must persuade him, or he will allow the old house to fall, and the high position you are entitled to will escape you once more. I thought A. might help us, but I suppose it was only a man's fancy for a pretty face—he tells her nothing."

"Do you think her so very pretty?" asked Isabella, half turning from the window to look down at Adèle.

"My dearest, do not look at her so. Your imprudent frankness will ruin everything. She is pretty, but she has no hold on W. His silence, his not writing, prove it. He is just the man to like a woman for a week, and be sick of her for a lifetime."

She paused! Isabella had burst out laughing, and Adèle had risen, pale, but cool.

"Madame," said she, addressing her mother-in-law, "I understand English a little. I need say no more. I am sure you are too well-bred a lady to utter again in my presence remarks you cannot wish me to hear."

She spoke calmly, sat down again, and resumed her work, as if nothing had happened. Isabella laughed till the tears ran down her cheek, not at Adèle, who was quite calm and self-possessed, but at Mrs. Osborne, who for once in her life at least looked disconcerted.

"I declare, Adèle, I shall like you," said Isabella, turning to her little sister-in-law; "I had no idea you had so much spirit. I thought you were tame, and I hate tame men or women."

Adèle looked up at her from her stool.

"How odd you are, Isabella," she said, smiling.

"Odd! how so?" asked Isabella, who instinctively felt a coming attack.

"You talk, look, and speak, as if I were a little girl."

"And pray, what are you?" asked Isabella, looking down

from her full height, as the French say, at the diminutive figure of Adèle, that looked lower and slighter on her low stool.

"The mistress of the house," she said, coolly; and she gave Isabella a little side nod of her young head, perfectly good-humoured, but perfectly conscious.

Isabella bit her lip and reddened.

Mrs. Osborne, quite recovered by this, smiled pleasantly.

"Quite right, my dear," she said, approvingly; "Isabella is a rude, naughty girl, who must be put in her place."

"Oh! I am not angry with her, not at all," kindly said Adèle.

"Quite right," observed Mrs. Osborne, more approvingly than before, "nor with me either, I am sure. I can rely on your good sense for that; so no more about it. And all this reminds me that I have a favour to ask of the little mistress of the house. We expect an old friend of ours to call in to-day. I confess I should like to ask him to stay to dinner."

"Then pray do," answered Adèle, very graciously.

"He is not merely an old friend of ours; he is a neighbour of yours: I allude—but here he is."

She rose, as the door was thrown open, and Jean, with emphatic dignity, announced—

"Monsieur le Baron."

And blooming, gay, handsome and good-humoured as ever the Baron entered, with a bow.

Mrs. Osborne went up to him, with gay reproachful grace.

"Truant!" she exclaimed, "what have you been doing all this age?"

"Longing to see Courcelles again!" said Monsieur de Launay, who dealt more than good taste allows, in pretty speeches. He kissed her hand, and went up to Isabella. She stood waiting, with the air of a queen; they met as potentates meet. Isabella bent her stately head. Monsieur de Launay's hand was laid on his heart.

"It is some time since we have met," she said, briefly.

"An eternity!" he answered in a low tone.

He looked up, like one imploring grace; she smiled down like one giving mercy; but no more was said. Anna, who had wakened on the entrance of the Baron, looked at him very crossly, and still more crossly replied, in answer to his polite inquiry concerning her health, that she was well when she could be quiet, a speech Monsieur de Launay understood in its general sense, as indicating the love of repose, and the happiness of a

retired life, and which he did not dream of applying to his entrance.

"Repose is to the mind—" he began, but a rustling robe by him made him turn from Anna on his left, who looked as sour as vinegar, to the lady who stood on his right. He looked down and saw Adèle. Her eyes gazed up in his face, calm and serene; with childish dignity she held out her hand; in a sweet, clear voice, she said :

"I am glad to see you."

What ailed the gay, the self-possessed Monsieur de Launay ? He looked at Adèle ; he turned red and pale, at length he took her hand and faltered a few low words, which did not reach her ear. Adèle gave him a look of quiet surprise, then walked away to one of the windows and looked out on the wintry landscape. Isabella stared at the Baron, who smiled faintly and said the room was hot.

"If I ever become that man's wife, how I shall hate him !" thought Isabella, indignantly.

A storm was brooding ; Mrs. Osborne hastened to interfere. What cold, bleak weather it was—how dissatisfied the labouring classes seemed—did he really apprehend another revolution. Thus far Adèle had vaguely listened, but she heard no more ; her thoughts had wandered away in a dream.

"Why does he not write ?" she thought. "Oh ! how long, how very long he has been away ! What an endless week since he left, and they came. They dislike me, and I cannot like them—save Anna, a little. Ah ! how changed my once happy, careless life is now ! I was so happy—so thoughtless—no one said bitter things of me—for I was nothing ;—who could envy the poorest and most insignificant of little girls ! And now ! Oh ! my friend, my only friend, you who would shelter me from every evil, guard me against every unkindness, why are you not here ? I have half hated, like an ingrate as I was, being so often near you with your kind arm around me, but now, oh ! how I long for that refuge—my true friend, my best friend, come back—come quickly."

Her heart swelled, her eyes overflowed. In vain she shook her head, her tears only came faster, and blinded her. Suddenly they ceased ; she had heard the distant tramp of a horse ; it was, it must be the step of Joli. Intently she looked. Layers of massive grey rocks rose like bastions above the road ; it sank down by them, and vanished in the gloom of their deep shadow, made deeper by hanging trees. From that invisible hollow rose up the

sound, but rider she as yet saw none. At length, above the sweep of foreground, appeared steed and horseman; it was he; it was Mr. Osborne; it was her husband. Adèle uttered a low cry, and darted out of the room.

The Baron gave a start.

What ails Mademoiselle de Courcelles?" he exclaimed, uneasily.

"Mademoiselle de Courcelles!" slowly repeated Isabella; "did you not read the whole of my letter? did you not turn the page?" she impatiently added; "and do me the honour of looking at the postscriptum."

"I was not aware," began the Baron, with some confusion—he abruptly ceased, and rose; from where he sat, his eye could command and survey the road, and some vision there seemed to have petrified him. At once Isabella was by his side. She saw nothing, save Adèle in the arms of her husband; pale, wrathful, and with silent anger in her eyes, she turned on Monsieur de Launay. "And what is that to you?" her whole aspect seemed to say.

The Baron struck his forehead, and looked confounded.

"Good God! they are married!" was all he said.

"Well, sir!" exclaimed Isabella, with quivering lips, "well, sir, what if they are?"

"Ah, Madame!" exclaimed Monsieur de Launay, "can you not understand my feelings? Such a breach of *convenance*, of etiquette, towards a lady, that lady too the mistress of the house, I have never been guilty of before."

He spoke with the tone and the look of a man of the world, shocked and distressed at having violated one of those polite laws which Tyrant Custom imposes on its slaves.

"What will Madame Osborne think of me?" he pursued; "I must trust to her goodness."

"She will think nothing," interrupted Isabella; "do you not see how pale and altered she is with fretting for William's absence? He is come back, and in that joy all your sins will be forgotten."

The Baron breathed relieved, and smiled.

"Your goodness restores me to life," he said.

In vain Isabella looked at him; his composed manner, his unmoved countenance, betrayed no deeper emotion than that of a well-bred man to whom a breach of good breeding, howsoever slight and unintentional, is matter of grave import and serious regret.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE CHANGE.

MR. OSBORNE had alighted; Jean was leading away the horse of his master; and Adèle was laughing and crying for joy in the arms of her husband. He stood on the lowest step of the flight that led to the Manor, looking down at her, whilst she, standing on the step above, was still obliged to look up. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes were dim, but her lips were smiling.

"Oh, I have been so unhappy!" she said, "I thought something had happened to you. I was wretched when the wind blew—wretched when it was still; but all is well now, all is well; my friend is come back."

Eager, warm, and cordial was her welcome; he could not, and did not, doubt its sincerity. She was glad to see him back. It was plain he need not have the irritating and tormenting thought that she had looked with terror to his return; that their meeting would be to her an infliction; so far he could not murmur; and if, spite of this, his look remained sad, if his welcome, spite her ardour, remained cold, it was because he could not forget; because the words he had heard, the face he had seen, had engraven themselves on his brain; they had become a part of his being, and could leave it no more."

"You look well," he said; "how is Lilian?"

"Lilian is well, and I am happy. Oh, how I have longed for you to come back!"

"Have you, Adele?" he said, and he smiled rather oddly; yet he did not disbelieve her.

"They are here," she continued, "your sisters and Madame Osborne."

He bit his lip, and looked anything but pleased.

"I have done all I could to make them comfortable," she pursued, "and if I have not succeeded, you will excuse it, will you not?"

"What has brought them here?" he asked, sharply; "they were well in Paris; what have they in view?"

He spoke with stern bitterness. Adèle looked a little frightened.

"Oh, pray meet them kindly," she said, seeking his hand, and pressing it with a sort of entreaty, "pray meet them kindly."

He did not seem to heed or hear her, but asked in a peculiar tone—

“Has Monsieur de Launay been here?”

“He is here now.”

“Of course.” He entered, closed the outer door, and, opening the door of the Hall, motioned his wife to pass in first; but Adèle drew back with a sagacious nod, and with the smiling intimation that she had orders to give Jeannette, she vanished down the staircase.

She met Jeannette half way.

“Dinner at once,” cried Adèle, gaily; “Monsieur is come back, and a fire in his study, too; it is cold, and he may have letters to write. Well, Jeannette, why do you stand and look at me?” she impatiently added, for her old friend did not move.

“Oh, Madame,” moaned Jeannette, “now is the time! Do not let them get hold of Monsieur! They have made you thinner and paler—do not let them take him from you, and kill you quite.”

Adèle looked as if it required all her love for the woman who had reared her, and all her pity for that woman's evident distress, not to lose her temper on hearing this speech.

“Take him away from me,” she said at length, in a low, passionate voice, whilst her cheek flushed and her eyes lit; “take him away from me, my husband and my only friend! Jeannette, he is mine, and I have bought him at such a price, that I will die before I lose him. But what am I saying?—I am as mad as you are. Why, he would see a whole legion of stepmothers and sisters perish before my little finger were hurt. “Go, old Jeannette,” she added, laying her hand on the old woman's shoulder, for she stood above her at the head of the staircase; “go, you have a naughty little mistress, who never can or will deserve the good man she has got; but such as she is, remember, once for all, Jeannette, that she is a loved wife, and that she knows it. And now gather your wits, and mind what I said about the dinner and the fire in your master's study.”

She nodded gaily and turned away, without waiting for a reply, and meeting Lilian, who was coming down the staircase step by step, she caught her in her arms, and, kissing her, she cried, in the joy of her heart,—

“Be glad,—be very glad, Lilian,—our friend is come back.”

“Aunt Isabella will not call me an ugly little monkey opposite papa, will she?” triumphantly asked Lilian.

Adèle coloured and laughed consciously; for though she did

not say so, she, too, thought; "and Madame Osbornè will not dare to think now that it was a man's fancy for a pretty face; oh, no, she will not!"

Lilian was one of those provokingly acute little girls—for boys have all the dulness of their sex in such matters—from whom concealment is impossible. Did she guess, as Adèle still held her in her arms, what was passing in her heart, that she looked with such mischievous glee in her young stepmother's eyes? Her look, if it meant anything, certainly meant, "Oh, yes, all is right now, the defender is come." Adèle put the child down, and kissed her again, Lilian returned the embrace; an alliance offensive and defensive was sealed between them from that hour.

They entered the Hall hand in hand; Monsieur De Launay was in the act of leaving. He bowed, and in a low tone delivered a congratulation and an apology. Adèle gave him a surprised look. Isabella had said it truly; she was not conscious of his offence. He returned the look with one in which something of reproach blended with surprise, bowed once more around, and was gone.

"How well the Baron looks," said Mrs. Osborne; "as well as ever."

"Ay, truly," said Mr. Osborne, "and not a whit less pleased with himself. Well, Lilian, how are you, child?"

He sank down on a couch with a wearied air, and took up his little girl on his knee, but he did not much heed her childish talk. Adèle had drawn her stool near him; she had sat on it, was looking up in his pale, haggard face with wistful attention, and spite of himself his look sought hers, spite of himself his look became kind, and his hand rested with involuntary affection on the dark and glossy head of his little wife. Adèle, half ashamed and half happy, laid her head on his knee.

"The dear child has been so unhappy without you," said Mrs. Osborne.

Adèle reddened, and raised her head; Mr. Osborne withdrew his hand.

"She thought herself quite forsaken," put in Isabella, leaning back in her chair, and thence ironically surveying her brother and his wife. Adèle smiled and said quietly:

"Not I; I only asked why he did not write."

"I could not write," said Mr. Osborne.

"And where were you?" asked Isabella; "too far away, I suppose."

"No, I was near enough."

"Then you deserve a good scolding from your wife; but no, she only gives you a tender gaze. Ah, well, when I have a husband——"

But the door opened, Jean entered, dinner was waiting in a neighbouring apartment now destined to that use.

"Why, you are not going to dine with us?" crossly said Isabella, as she saw Lilian take hold of the skirts of Adèle.

"No, Lilian, you must not," said Mr. Osborne; "I object." He paused and smiled as he met his wife's entreating look, and merely saying, "you will spoil her," he yielded.

But for Isabella the meal would have been silent. Mr. Osborne had a sort of indulgent liking for his sister Isabella; all he saw in her remarks was the petulance of a spoiled beauty. Did Adèle see more in them that she seemed unable to touch the food on her plate, unable to do any thing save to look at her husband, opposite whom she sat? For spite the remonstrative looks of Mr. Osborne, spite the cross inquiry of Anna, who asked to know why people could not eat their dinner without other people making all that noise, Isabella rattled on about husbands who neglected their wives, and wives who mourned for their husbands, until Mr. Osborne, near whom she sat, turned towards her, and gently patting her cheek, asked with kind irony,—

"Isabella, is not this rather in bad taste?"

Isabella reddened violently, and laughed a forced laugh; but she did not venture to add another word; there was something in her brother's look that enjoined silence, and little as she knew of him or perhaps for that very reason, he was the only member of her family that could inspire Isabella with anything like fear. She would have scorned to acknowledge it, even to herself, but it was so.

The meal was over; Lilian had been dismissed by her father; the family had re-entered the Hall where the lamp burned on a central table. Mr. Osborne looked at his watch.

"It is late," he said; "I have letters to write, I must bid you all good-night."

"There is a fire in your study," said Adèle.

She stood by the mantelpiece, with her hands clasped on its white marble edge. He went up to her, laid his hand on her shoulder, and looked at her kindly.

"Do not wait for me," he said; "I shall be obliged to sit up late."

Very earnestly she looked at him, but she did not say a word. The door closed upon him; Anna had resumed her place by the

fireside; Isabella and her mother were holding a private conference at the further end of the room, and Adèle remained where her husband had left her, with her eyes fixed on the blazing fire. At length she turned away, drew a seat near the table, and took out her work.

"My dear child! what ails you?" exclaimed Mrs. Osborne, in a tone of concern; "you look quite unwell."

"Do I?" said Adèle, looking up.

"I am afraid," pursued Mrs. Osborne, glancing round to feel quite sure that Isabella had really left the room, "I am afraid you take my naughty child's jokes in good earnest."

Adèle smiled, but did not reply.

"You see, my dear," continued Mrs. Osborne, leaning over the back of her daughter-in-law's chair, and looking down at her very kindly, "young wives are apt to be too exacting—and men in business require an indulgence they do not always get. Do not trouble yourself because he did not write—far better not write than write coldly or in a hurry. Do not mind because he leaves you this evening for letters; he must begin by doing it sooner or later. Do not look at me so oddly child—on my word, I sincerely and from my heart wish you to lead the happiest life with William. My remarks may not be pleasant, but they are well meant."

And to do her justice, Mrs. Osborne spoke quite sincerely; if she also wished to separate herself from the very first from Isabella's aggressive ways towards Mr. Osborne's wife—truly we cannot blame her. Nor did Mr. Osborne's wife seem displeased; but she smiled like one amused.

"How strange all this is!" she said at length, leaning her elbow on the table and her cheek on her hand. "How very strange!" The light of the lamp fell full on her face, and Mrs. Osborne saw that it was flushed and bright, and that Adèle was smiling at something in her own thoughts.

She was smiling at images that rose out on the gloom of the past, keen, bright, half pleasing, half painful. She saw herself the half wild, rebellious girl pining for liberty by his side. She saw him devoted, fond, in all the happiness of love and right uniting—and looking up in Mrs. Osborne's face, Adèle laughed gaily. What! she forgotten, neglected by him! It was a delusion so strange, that it could only move her laughter. But Mrs. Osborne looked amazed; Adèle hastened to apologise.

"Excuse me," she said, good-humouredly, "and do not think I mind Isabella. If I seem and am sad, it is because he looks so ill."

She resumed her work, and a tear trembled beneath her dark lashes and fell on the handkerchief she was embroidering.

Mrs. Osborne resumed her seat. "She seems very secure," she thought; "yet I know nothing of his face if she does not find herself mistaken yet." But it was no business of hers, and as Isabella re-entered the room at that moment, Mr. Osborne's name was mentioned no more.

Women are said to be talkers; these four women did not talk much. Anna hated the trouble; Mrs. Osborne was busy; Isabella did not condescend, and Adèle did not open her lips. She had early discovered that, though Anna liked to be made comfortable, and though Mrs. Osborne was civil, there was, and there could be no real sympathy, and consequently no real conversation between her and the family she had entered. They had lived in a world of which she knew nothing, and they spoke of it in set terms, that could not dispel her ignorance. They did not seem to care either to enlighten her. She was young, inexperienced, ignorant of a hundred things she ought to have known, at a disadvantage in all save her beauty, of which she was so careless, that she did not seem to feel its value, and as she was, they were quite willing to leave her.

Adèle once laid down her work to look round; Anna was sleeping by the fire; Mrs. Osborne and Isabella were exchanging remarks in English concerning Mrs. Beaumont, who it seems—tell it not in Gath—was a little bit of a flirt. She was in her own country in her own home; they made her feel like a stranger in a strange land, in a strange house. Oh, for the freedom of the little room where Jeannette told her old stories; for Mademoiselle de Janson sitting in her chair murmuring at the world and its going away, for the dreaming little girl who lived in a bright, gay world, and cared for no one. Vain thought—vain wish—vain regrets. She looked at the wedding-ring on her finger. He was there, and so was she. That gold circle had magic in it; it bound them both with chains of adamant. For ever and for ever she was his and he was hers. That eternity had made her heart sick during the first weeks of their marriage. She began to feel a sort of charm in it now—a sort of sad wish to be not herself, but him—not Adèle, but the wife of William Osborne. "I have suffered," she thought, "because I did not surrender entirely; and to be divided is torment. But that first revolt is over now. He wished for me, and freely I gave myself; he has me, and I will forget that liberty was sweet." But she did not add—"I will receive as well as give;" perhaps because

she could not; perhaps because she did not know that part of Love's happiness is to give happiness, and that a woman who does not love her husband robs him of Love's most royal gift—the power of blessing. Yet of one thing she did think; one thing she did feel. As her eyes wandered over the cold circle of cold faces amongst which she sat a little unloved stranger, she felt and thought—"They do not like me, and they are not very kind; but I may laugh at them; I have got him."

At her usual hour Adèle rose, and bade her relatives good night! They kept late hours, and slept late, and Adèle rose with dawn.

"Good evening, my dearest child!" sweetly said Mrs. Osborne.

"Good night, Adèle!" said Isabella, without looking up from her book.

"Good night!" languidly said Anna, near whose chair Adèle stood. "If it were not that I am so very comfortable, I would lift up my head and kiss you."

"I can stoop," replied Adèle, amused.

And so she did; but as her lips touched Anna's cheek, Anna's voice murmured in her ear—

"Do not let them get hold of William."

Adèle did not reply; she left the Hall, and went up to her room; but she felt like one in a dream. What made her sister-in-law use the very words of Jeannette? What made them both warn her against a danger which to her seemed mere derision? "Take him away!" she thought, "how can they? He has given himself to me as much as I have given myself to him. If I am his wife, is he not my husband? Take him away, indeed! And what would be left to me then? But how could they take him away? Is he weak, childish, or foolish? Let them if they can," she thought, with some scorn, "let them if they dare!"

But it was a thought on which she could not linger. She sat down by the bright fire that burned on the hearth, and taking up her Prayer-book that lay on the table, she looked for something in it, which she read again and again. Then she fell into a long, deep dream.

Two struck as Mr. Osborne entered his wife's room. Her fire had burned low, and she had fallen asleep in her chair. Her dark hair had got loose, and it flowed around her pale face, and made it look more pale. With folded arms and bent look, Mr. Osborne stood on the hearth, and gazed down at his wife. Was this wan girl with thin cheeks and sunken eyes the blooming

beauty of sixteen he had married five weeks ago? Could, in so short a space of time, the misery of being his wife bring down to this a light and careless girl? Oh, for the power to break the chain she found so bitter and he so galling! For his liberty vainly given for hers, gift to him so hateful, yet which he never could restore!

Mr. Osborne had been a week away, and that week had told him all he could learn. Like all thoughtful men, he did not observe much; many things escaped his attention, but he only saw the farther, the deeper, when he did look, and when a fact, when a thought, seized him, he fastened on them in return, and left them no more. A man of quicker perceptions would have perceived earlier than Mr. Osborne that his wife had not married him for love, but he would scarcely in her absence, without a clue to lead him, have arrived to the certain knowledge Mr. Osborne had attained. Better, far better, than Adèle herself, he could have said through what mixture of liking, of carelessness, of audacity, and ignorance, she had married him; better than herself, he could have explained the silent revolt she had felt, the misery she had endured, the despair in which revolt and misery had closed. Better than herself, he could have told her real nature—light, frivolous as that of the present girl; deep, passionate as that of the future woman. Why had she married him but because she was thoughtless? Why had she suffered but because she was strong? Their lives, he felt it too late, should never have met and united, for when her hour for love would rise, his would be set and gone; when she would be capable of loving and appreciating him, he would have entered that graver period of manhood in which woman's love, if not already possessed and won since youth, is more of an affliction than of a blessing. Mr. Osborne was very proud; and there is a calm dignity in the noon of man's life, a repose from unquietness and passion he could not wish to violate. He was quite willing to love Adèle his whole life long, and more the last day than the first; but he had begun to love her late enough, and he could not wait for those tardy years which, like Byron's favourite epitaph, implore peace; years in which, in man or woman, the charming and delightful follies of youth are so unseemingly and so sad.

"Poor child!" he thought, as he looked at Adèle, still sleeping, "would I had never seen her, or rather, would she had never seen me. My lot is hard, hers is still harder. She regrets now lost freedom—and she does not know what a long, what a cold, unloving, unblest life is before her. And she will be—as she told me once—she will be seventeen in May."

Here the Prayer-book of Adèle fell from her lap on the floor. She awoke with the sound. Mr. Osborne picked it up and gave it to her, but not without first seeing that she had been reading the marriage service. He sat down on one of those little couches which the French call *vis-à-vis*, and which were first invented by fond, selfish married people, who want no stupid, foolish third between them. At once Adèle rose, and went and sat down by him; she laid her head on his shoulder, she took his hand in her own. Of course! Had she not been reading the marriage ceremony? He bit his lip; he longed to put her away, to say some harsh, unkind word, that would scare her for ever, and teach her to come thus and there from duty; but he only looked down at her and smiled a little ironically.

"I know why you did not write," she said; "you have been ill! I did not say so below. I saw you did not wish to speak of it, but you have been ill. I know it."

He was a little startled at her penetration; for it was true, he had spent in a lonely room, in a lonely inn, six days of the seven he had been away.

"You did not want me to know it," she continued, "therefore you did not write. But, oh! promise to do so no more. These last three nights I have not slept."

Without looking at her, he gave the required promise. He knew well enough, that in a certain irritating way, she was fond of him.

"That is not all," she pursued. "You have had great trouble. I see it in your face. Why have you allowed it to make you so unhappy? It must be borne, you know."

Mr. Osborne looked down at his wife, and smiled very sweetly.

"Anything can be borne," he said.

Adèle thought he meant any thing could be borne with her. Her heart beat, she raised his hand to her lips, and kissed it with humble and tender affection.

"Take him away from me?" she thought, remembering the double warning she had received. "Let them if they can—let them if they dare. He is all I have got—my friend—my husband—my lover, too—I defy them!"

Little she knew that she had lost the calm, impartial friend, on the day when she had found the lover under the lime tree; little she imagined that the lover was alienated and estranged, that the husband alone remained, and a husband who, though neither unloving nor unkind, yet cherished in his heart the memory of a great wrong. She did not know it, still she thought:

"If it were not that it is impossible, I should fancy, but it is a tiresome wicked fancy, that he likes me less."

Alas! it was no fancy; he already liked her less—bitter, inevitable result. Ay, and he felt it too, from the sort of weariness he found in sitting there with her. A low fire burned in the marble chimney; he looked at it with fixed and moody gaze; no more sacred to trust and love was that domestic hearth. Her head was on his shoulder, his hand was in hers, his arm was around her, but dearly, very dearly did he look forward to the length of years before him. He looked forward to it as a worn and impatient traveller standing on the mountain's brow, measures with weary eye the low, dusty road that stretches on through the arid plain unto the goal of the far horizon.

That this clouded mood would pass away he knew. Life, experience had taught him this much; but night is dark for all that the sun may shine to-morrow, and little comfort was it for him to know that the day would come when this grief would be buried in his heart, as the dead lie buried in their graves.

But we all have our lot to bear in this world; Mr. Osborne bore his. "I have been mad," he thought, "and I must pay for it. It is just."



CHAPTER XXXIV.

LA ROCHE AUX FÈES.

MR. OSBORNE did not appear at breakfast the next morning. Adèle was extending her hand to ring the bell, when her mother-in-law observed with a gracious smile,—

"My love, do you not know William is gone?"

"Gone!" cried Adèle, who had not seen her husband that morning.

"Yes, love; I dare say he will not be more than a few days away."

Adèle was mute. Isabella laughed insolently.

"There never was such a man as William. I thought Adèle would be able to tell us where his lordship was gone to; but no, she knows no more than we do."

Adèle did not answer the taunt, but her coffee remained untasted. She was beginning to feel; her shield was broken; the

arrow could pierce it and wound her. Isabella was vexed with her brother; the first hint about the Baron had brought down a sharp reply; she felt in an ill humour, and as she had that sort of bad temper that must needs vent itself on an object, she now fastened on her absent brother's wife. William was eccentric; William did not care about women; William had fits of liking; William was bitter in his very sweetness; in short, whilst she sipped her coffee Miss Osborne delivered a litany on the failings of William; Adèle heard her to the end without a word of reply. When Isabella ceased at length, Mr. Osborne's wife looked at his sister and smiled.

"Yes," she said; "but William is fond of me, Isabella."

And as breakfast was over, she rose and left the room.

"My dearest," said Mrs. Osborne to her daughter, "*we* see that William does not care much for her, let *her* think what she likes. I should like to consult with you upstairs about that letter—you know."

They left the Hall—it had kept its privileges as breakfast-room—together; they had been gone ten minutes when Adèle returned. She seemed absorbed in thought; Anna looked at her crossly, but Adèle stood on the hearth gazing at the fire. She did not feel the look. Anna had to take the trouble of speaking.

"Why did you not mind what I said last night?" she asked, sharply; "why did you let them get hold of him? Why did you not know he was gone when they did? Well, what ails you?"

For Adèle was blushing and laughing with very mischievous mirth.

"Do they know when he is coming back?" she asked; "do they know where I am to meet him in an hour? Do they know where he is taking me? He would not tell them lest Isabella should want to come, and he wants no one but me."

Her eyes sparkled with childish triumph; Anna's brow smoothed, and she smiled at the enemy's error. But how did Adèle know this?

"I went upstairs to cry," replied Adèle, frankly, "and I found the kindest little letter on my pillow. He says I look unwell, that I want air, that I must clothe myself warmly."

"You know you have given me that fur thing," put in Anna, uneasily; "and it would kill me to take it off."

"As if I wanted it again! What can I do for you before going?"

"Just wheel my chair a bit nearer to the fire."

Adèle complied with the request, and in her joy, for she felt very happy, she gave her sister-in-law a kiss.

"Are you what is called in love with William?" asked Anna.

"How should I know?" shortly replied Adèle; "I am very fond of him. Is this being in love?"

"How should I know?" replied Anna; "but I hope you are not. I have always heard that when married people are in love, they can think of no one but each other—so selfish, you know."

"I have a mind to fall in love with him to vex her," thought Adèle, very much provoked with that speech. "What business has she to ask such questions and make such remarks?"

But Anna mollified her by adding,—

"He is in love with you, of course, and you need not mind what ma said yesterday. He is the last man to get tired of a woman, only he must not be teased or interfered with."

"I wish they would let me and my husband alone," thought Adèle, a little impatiently, but still the words "he is in love with you, of course," were soothing, and, like charity, covered a multitude of sins. So merely observing that it was time for her to go and dress, she left her sister-in-law to her fireside enjoyment.

Mr. Osborne had been painfully struck with the altered aspect of Adèle, for, after all, he was fond of her, and love feels a hundred tormenting fears unknown to indifference. She was thin and pale, what if her health should ultimately suffer? He could not endure the thought. He had ascertained that since his absence she had scarcely left the house; he thought and wished to think that her life was too confined; that exercise and air would bring back the bloom to that faded cheek. The morning was grey and mild when he rose, the clouds in the sky hung heavy and low; a few days more, and they would break into white drenching rains, but for the present they tempered the sharpness of the winds, and gave spring softness to the late November season. He sat down and wrote the short pencilled note Adèle had found on her pillow.

Adèle was soon dressed. She stole down stairs unperceived, crossed the court, entered the garden, and rejoicing in her triumph, lightly ran down its sanded alleys. She slackened her pace as she reached the orchard. No one ever came there, and there, for that reason, Mr. Osborne had asked his wife to meet him. He had made an assignation like a lover; but not like a lover was he waiting for Adèle. He was there, indeed, sitting on a bench by the wall, but his arms were folded, his bent look was not watching for her coming. She stood within a few paces of him, looking at him rather wistfully, and he did not see her.

"What can he be thinking of?" she wondered; "he has scarcely said ten words to me since he came back. What ails him?"

Here Mr. Osborne raised his look and saw his wife standing before him, with a shy, hesitating look. With sad earnestness he, too, looked at her. Over her usual attire Adèle had thrown one of those African Burnous of creamy-coloured wool, then newly introduced in France. Its hood was drawn over her head, and fell around her pale face in soft rounded folds that rested on her shoulders, and as with half-turned head she stood looking at her husband, he seemed to see again that sad head of Beatrice Cenci, that divine image of childish sorrow and beauty, doubly sad because so young, which once seen haunts the heart for ever. With a keen pang he remembered the joyous girl tossing up the apples in the grass. The sad gravity of his countenance disconcerted Adèle. She thought him vexed, she stammered an apology.

"I am very sorry," she said, "I am sorry I have made you wait."

"We have plenty of time," he replied, rising; "we go out this way."

He opened as he spoke a low door in the orchard-wall. Adèle went out without venturing to ask where he was taking her. He followed her out, locked the door, put the key in his pocket, and took her arm within his, all silently. They walked a few steps up a path in the rock, then Adèle stopped short, and said emphatically,—

"Good morning; I have not seen you to-day, you know."

"Good morning," he quietly replied; "you have never been here before, have you?"

"Never," she answered, listlessly; she hung her head. What ailed her husband, that his very voice was so cold?

"Take care," he said, "you will hurt yourself, if you do not mind those sharp stones."

They were ascending a lonely path in a lonely mountain. It wound away without visible limit or horizon, among grey slate rocks, colourless and barren. For ever it seemed to go on as if it would climb, Titan like, to the very sky.

"Rest here," said Mr. Osborne, after a while.

She was not tired, but she obeyed. She sat down on a ledge of rock, and leaning her elbow on her knee and her cheek on her hand, she looked around her passively. It was a wild spot, wild and silent, a sterile solitude, that seemed as if it had never felt the step, never heard the voice of man. In the cleft of a broad

rock that hung above the stony path, grew a yellow tuft of grass, beaten by the wind and withered by the autumn storms; other vegetation she saw none. Above the rock rose a solitary pine-tree, dark and melancholy, spreading for ever its broad arms to the wind, calling it with a sad low voice, and when it came, as come it did with a rush and a roar, wailing at its might. Adèle gave it a careless look, then gazed at Mr. Osborne. Why did he stand there, instead of sitting by her? Why was he so silent? why could she look at him without meeting that fond gaze, which she remembered, but which, since his return, had never rested on her? She started to her feet with a sort of impatience and unrest.

"Are you rested?" he asked.

"As if I had ever been tired!" she replied, shortly; but he did not notice her petulant tone; he did not see the slight frown that knit her brow—the flush that burned on her cheek; and if he had noticed and seen them, he would not have understood the meaning of those signs.

Again they went on; a rushing sound Adèle heard; a little more, and they stopped; the path ended; the spot was reached.

Down from a steep mountain side it rushed, white and foaming, a mountain waterfall enclosed in rocks, vanishing in gloom, a swift yet enduring apparition of glittering waters and white spray coming whence none could tell, going whither none could see.

"Why this is surely the Roche aux Fées?" exclaimed Adèle, half drawing back.

Mr. Osborne turned round.

"It is," he said; "well, you are not afraid of fairies, are you?"

Adèle looked at him, and she reddened and laughed. He knew nothing; but all the warnings of Jeannette rushed back to her, and half amused—half provoked her.

"Come nearer; you see nothing here," he said, holding out his hand.

She gave him an alarmed look, and said she had rather not; but he derided her causeless fear, and before she could resist, she had been drawn to his side, and they had both descended three slippery steps of rock. Once within the roar and foam of the torrent, Adèle forgot the legendary perils of the place. An irregular ledge of stone went round the hollow in which the water fell; it was narrow, but safe to a sure foot and a steady eye.

"Will you be afraid to go there with me?" asked Mr. Osborne.

The heart of Adèle beat a little, but she recklessly replied—
"Afraid! no, why should she be afraid?"

He smiled at her daring look, and bidding her not fear, he passed his arm around her waist, and holding her hand in his, he led her along; a few steps, and the spot was reached. They stood within a yard of the waterfall; they could see it from where it rushed above to where it sank below. The heart of Adèle beat so violently against her husband's arm that he looked down, and taxed her with fear.

"No, no, it is not that!" she said; but her face covered with spray had a breathless, startled look that belied her words. And yet it was not fear she felt then; it was that something that has no name, and that seizes and sways us when we least expect it; in crowded rooms, where languid ladies smile on still more languid men; in lonely gardens when the wind is sweeping past; by calm firesides, when the light shines on friendly faces; by wild rocks and foaming waters; by vast seas and silent shores;—anywhere, when life overflows within us, and the calmness of existence is its torment.

What would not have Adèle given to still the beating of her heart, to send away the flush she felt burning on her cheek, to be anywhere away—anywhere on that bleak rock above, in that dark glen below, anywhere but there with him in that narrow spot where she could not move a step. She felt his look full on her, searching, penetrating, keen, and she longed for the power of flight. Suddenly and daringly she braved that gaze, and looking up, found that she had been mistaken. He still kept a firm and secure hold of her, but his other arm leaned on a projecting rock, his forehead rested on the palm of his hand, and his half-averted face was turned away from her towards the torrent.

Nature is full of mysteries; she calls us with luring voice from world and tumult; and when she has us, she sends us away far into the past—far into the future; rarely does she keep us with her in the visible present we have come to see. The spot was wild, and it had a wild sort of dreary beauty. Below the white waterfall lay the depth of rocks thrown in masses on other masses lower and farther away; above it spread the softness of grey clouds and thin mists, half torn by bare, bleak peaks. But of all this William Osborne saw nothing; he was listening to the voice of a Syren—to the call of the beloved of his youth. "What brings you here?" asked Solitude; "you know you have forsaken me. The time is gone when we loved and were blest. Do you remember that pale summer noon with me by the *Mer de Glace* on the

Montanvert—when you saw the daisy grow in the rock of ice—when the scent of the Alpine rose filled the chill air—when you heard the eagle scream, and listened to the falling avalanche? Do you remember that burning morn when we stood together in the temple of Neptune in Pæstum, and saw behind its yellow columns the line of a blue silent sea, where ships sail by and seek no more the fallen city? Do you remember those grey days in silent English parks, where the herd of deer looked at you as they sped by, in lonely untilled heaths, above which the crow flew on heavy wing, in endless plains that never seemed to reach the far horizon? Oh, what have you been doing? You have a mill that forges iron, you have ledgers and account-books; and you have a wife, too, a young and beautiful wife; but you have me, your first-loved, the delight of your heart, the enchantment of your life—you have me no more."

"What is he dreaming of?" wondered Adèle, with a sort of pain. "I wish he would not—it is tiresome—it is irritating. What ails him?" And secure from his absent look against detection, she too forgot the waterfall, and looking at her husband, she fell into a long deep dream. But vainly she questioned that pale, handsome, intellectual profile; the language it spoke was one she knew not how to read: it told her no story. She looked again and again, and learned nothing for all her looking. "What is he really like?" she asked of herself, half-perplexed, half-provoked. "I have found that my husband was very different from my friend, will my husband be different from himself, and if so—how?"

"Have you enough of it?" asked Mr. Osborne, suddenly wakening from his reverie. "Do you wish to go in?"

"We are scarcely out," she said, a little shortly.

"Then sit down."

There was a convenient hollow behind her, indeed it was known as the Banc des Fées; Adèle sat down on it, and said pointedly:

"There is room for two."

He smiled at the hint, and sat down by her. Adèle saw the smile, and brightened at once.

"Where will you take me to-morrow?" she asked, assuming, with childish subtlety, that it was his intention to take her out again. He was taken by surprise, and blindly fell into the trap.

"Anywhere you please," was his prompt reply.

"Bring me here then!" she as promptly answered.

"Do you like this place so much?" he asked.

Adèle gave her husband a look which he did not understand.

"I want to know more about you," she thought; but she answered carelessly: "Oh! yes, she liked it very well."

"It is very chill, Adèle; we must go in, or you will take cold."

"No—no—" she said, impatiently, "I must stay—I will stay—talk to me—tell me something."

"Talk to you—about what?"

"What were you thinking of whilst you were looking at that water a while ago?"

"Of places I have seen."

"What places were they?"

He made an effort and replied; he described as graphically as he could, too, but Adèle saw the effort, and was stung. "It is a bore to him," she thought; she rose abruptly, and said it was tiresome to sit there watching that splashing waterfall.

"Do you still wish to come to-morrow?" he asked, as after leading her safely back, he gave her his hand to ascend the three steps that led to the path. She turned full upon him her flushed and vexed face.

"Yes, I do," she said, and without waiting for his arm she darted down the path, carolling gaily, that he might not guess she was crying.

"Ah! what a child I have tied myself to," thought Mr. Osborne, as he followed her down, "incapable of love, incapable even of grief, delightful in her way, but still and for ever a child."

He heard the song; he did not see the tears. They had no sooner entered the orchard, than of her own accord Adèle took her husband's arm; but she did not speak, nor did he.

They had not walked far in the garden, when they saw M. Morel and Miss Osborne talking at the corner of an alley. The foreman looked humble, the lady looked imperious, and neither saw Mr. Osborne and his wife.

"Monsieur Morel, I shall want you in the counting-house presently," said Mr. Osborne, coldly, and he passed on.

"You are going to the counting-house," said Adèle, looking half vexed. "What for?"

"For business, child," he answered, surprised at the question.

"But I want you," she said; "I want you—in the conservatory, I mean."

"What for?" he asked, very simply.

"What for!" she echoed, disconcerted.

But Mr. Osborne calmly looked down, unconscious of offence.

"You are really come home," said the free voice of Isabella, who suddenly appeared before them barring their path. "I suppose I may speak to your lordship by and bye."

"Now, if you like," he said.

It was evident he considered the presence of his wife no objection. Adèle was softened at once; she smiled in his face, dropped his arm, and giving Isabella a gracious nod that plainly said: "You may have him now—I have done with him," she walked away.

Isabella tried not to look indignant, and Mr. Osborne turned to his sister like one prepared to listen.

"Have you thought about the matter I mentioned this morning?" she asked.

"Are you in a great hurry, Isabella?"

He laid his hand on her shoulder, and smiled kindly, but a little ironically, in her face.

"Oh! you may laugh!" she replied; "you are a man, and you can command life! I am a woman, and it will take me years to be where you were at twenty. Ah! to be a man!" she exclaimed, tapping her forehead and turning up her blue eyes, "to be a man, young, well born, well educated, handsome, not poor, and to have the world before me—how I would laugh at women, at marriage, and all bonds. But enough!" she added, falling back to earth and its concerns; "I hope you will not dream about it, William. I tell you I am resolved to be Madame la Baronne, and though you are not bound to help me—you are bound not to make me lose time."

"Strictly logical! How old are you, Isabella?"

"I shall be eighteen in June. What about it?"

"A year older than my little Adèle," he thought, but aloud he merely said:

"There is, indeed, no time to lose. Well, I shall not dream about it, as you say; but are you so very sure of being Madame la Baronne?"

"Sure! you ask me if I am sure?"

She stared amazed at the question. He smiled.

"I beg a thousand pardons, as Monsieur de Launay would say, and, as I said, I shall not dream, but think."

Isabella would have liked something more explicit, but it was perfectly useless to tease Mr Osborne. He could be annoyed easily enough; controlled or persuaded was out of the question; in his very hesitation and irresolution he was and remained his own master.

As they entered the house, Adèle met them. Mr. Osborne looked at the two, his handsome sister, his pretty wife. Adèle was not so striking as Isabella, but she had more real beauty; yet it was not that made him rest his hand on her head and look down at her with a kind smile. "Better," he thought, "the light, childish heart, than no heart at all; better the thoughtless girl who marries and does not know why, than the clever, designing woman who, in her thoughts, is already the wife of a man that has never spoken a word of love; better for herself, and better, too, for me," he internally added, stroking his wife's smooth cheek.

"As if I would ever have had you," thought Isabella, whose conscience helped her penetration, and who looked at them both rather irefully, and aloud she exclaimed, with petulant irony,—

"Oh, dear! oh, dear! I suppose we shall have yesterday evening over again,—your dutiful wife sitting on the conjugal stool at your feet. Well, well, my husband shall give me a throne, or I will have none of him."

She opened the door of the Hall and entered it, without troubling herself about her brother or his wife.

"She is very odd," said Adèle, with a grave shake of the head.

"More than odd," thought Mr. Osborne. Bold speech was what he least forgave in woman. Take the advice of a friend, fair lady reader; be whatever you choose; plot for a husband, if you have not got one, and catch one if you can; be as unwomanly as you like; but oh! be gentle and feminine, whatever you do. Adèle was more indulgent and more penetrating, too, than Mr. Osborne. "A throne, indeed!" she thought; "she will be too busy in watching her husband to have time to sit on it."

Her hand was on the door, but she saw Mr. Osborne turning away.

"You are going," she said hesitatingly.

"Yes, to the counting-house;" and he went.

Adèle entered the Hall, took her work-basket, and went up to the old saloon on the first floor. It looked vast and gloomy, and it felt chill; she only crossed it, and opening a glass door, she entered the gallery which her husband had converted into a green sheltered garden. She sat by the fountain and worked patiently. "He will come, he must come," she thought, "he cannot have forgotten that."

Alas! he had forgotten it; he had ceased to desire being

alone with his wife, and when the wish fled from his heart, oblivion came and invaded it.

Adèle worked until dusk gathered around her. The glass door then opened, the childish head of Lilian appeared, and in her clear treble voice, she said,—

“Papa has sent me for you.”

He had sent for her, he had not come. Sadly Adèle rose, and followed the child. As they reached the head of the staircase she paused and said,—

“Lilian, did he kiss you to-day?”

“I don’t know, I don’t know,” sang Lilian in English, as she skipped down the staircase. She did not know, and she did not care. But Adèle knew that her husband had not kissed her cheek, had not pressed her hand that day. True, she was not in love with him—true, his fondness had often tormented and irritated her; but she was his wife, bound to him for life; she could not wish him to cease loving her; she could not wish him to have grown careless and cool after five weeks’ marriage. Nor though her heart swelled did she accuse him of indifference. She only thought “He has cares, he has troubles, he is peculiar, too; I must study him, I must learn to know him, that is all.”

Mr. Osborne perceived at once his wife’s dull and listless looks. His inquiry of what ailed her was both prompt and kind, but it was not fond, yet Adèle thought it was—natural error. When we have once received a great truth, we cannot reject it in a moment. Mr. Osborne was altered, and he showed it more than he meant to show it, but Adèle could not see it. Her mental vision still preserved the image of the fond and happy lover whom she had the double power to charm and to bless; and for some time, at least, she could not see the saddened man whose heart she had ceased to move. His simple words, “what ails you?” sounded both tender and loving. She smiled, she said she was well; in a moment she was bright and gay. Yet when dinner was over Adèle did not sit on the conjugal stool, or, to speak more correctly, she sat on it, but did not make it conjugal by placing it at the feet of her husband. She drew it within the shelter of Anna’s chair, and remained without the little domestic circle. Mr. Osborne had no letters to write, and he stayed with his family. Mrs. Osborne was voluble, Isabella was dashing and brilliant; even Anna found something to say, but Adèle was mute as a mouse.

Adèle was thinking. Her youth had been full to overflowing with sensations delightful and enchanting, but it had rarely ques-

tioned thought, and rarely found any reply. But she thought now, perhaps because she had suffered, perhaps because her time to think was come, perhaps because she had found an object that interested her and gave food for speculation.

Her husband could see her where she sat, but he could not see that she was looking at him, nor could Isabella and Mrs. Osborne. Anna might have perceived which way her sister-in-law's eyes went, but she did not, for to look down would have made her uncomfortable. Unheeded and unwatched, with her work lying in her lap from the earnestness of her gaze, Adèle looked at Mr. Osborne as she had never looked at any one before.

To look hard at people is rude; and Jeannette had so plainly informed Adèle that to look hard at gentlemen would put strange, impertinent ideas in their head, that spite her natural daring, Adèle had in some alarm firmly resolved never to look at Mr. Osborne so as to authorize in him an unkind thought. But now that was over, what need she fear?—nothing! She had a right to look at him as long as she liked, and she did not ask herself why she sat by Anna's chair and looked by stealth and in secret.

She looked, and certainly saw in her husband what she had never seen in him before. The sad calmness and serious dignity of his aspect oppressed her. "Shall I be afraid of him?" she thought, disturbed to experience as his wife a feeling with which he had never inspired her before their marriage. She watched him; he was smiling at one of Isabella's speeches—a courteous, calm smile, but very ironical. How could Isabella endure it? "He must never smile so at me," thought Adèle, "never! I could not bear it." She looked at him again; Mr. Osborne had fallen into one of his absent moods; his handsome countenance had resumed its natural repose. He was dreaming, and Adèle felt that he was far from her, very far away indeed.

It pained her; they were married; but what availed marriage if they were not one? She had revolted against that union because it made her suffer; but the pain had died in its own excess. Duty, inexorable necessity, sincere admiration, affection deep and true, had conquered rebellion. It was over, and it had left behind a great truth—Adèle was Mr. Osborne's wife, his companion, his equal; no more his little friend; she was truly and verily his wife; she had felt it too keenly, too bitterly, not to feel it both strongly and deeply now.

"He must not dream so," she thought, impatiently; "I will not be a little girl to be kissed, caressed, then set aside. He is

fond of me, but he must be more than fond of me. Ah, if they were not here, I would draw my stool near him, and soon get to the bottom of all his dreams. Why did they come? why was I so careless before they came?" But Adèle remembered the long lonely walk of the morrow, and she smiled. How she would do it, what she intended doing, she did not know nor care. She only felt that it would be done.

"There it is!" exclaimed Mr. Osborne, with a half start.

"Oh, how dreadful!" moaned Anna.

"I quite expected it," said Mr. Osborne.

"What are they talking about?" wondered Adèle, wakening from her long reverie.

A rushing sound soon told her. The clouds had broken; the threatened rain had come; it was pouring in torrents.

"Good-bye to the Roche aux Fées," thought Adèle. "Well, never mind, opportunities cannot fail me; if they do, I will make them; I am his wife. I have given him all I had to give. If I can keep back nothing from him, shall he keep back from me the better and nobler part of himself? He shall not; he shall take me to his heart figuratively as well as really. Truly I will not stand at the door when it is my privilege and my right to get in."

Here she paused, half-pleased, half-frightened at making the attempt; and still looking at her husband, she felt the vague wakening in her heart of agitation and unrest, the vague foreboding of unborn storms.

CHAPTER XXXV.

REGRET.

It rained for a month.

It was raining fast, as Mr. Osborne paced up and down the old Hall with folded arms and thoughtful brow, whilst his step-mother stood and looked at him with a fixed, meditative gaze. She saw him well, for the lamp that burned on the table gave a clear white light that illumined his whole face; the pale forehead shaded by dark curls, the brow contracted by sad or bitter thoughts, the dark eye fixed in a dream, the rigid features and compressed

lips, told her but one story: Mr. Osborne was ill in body or in mind.

They were alone, for Adèle had just gone up to her room, and Isabella was with her sister, who had a cold. Mrs. Osborne availed herself of the opportunity.

"William," she said, "you are unwell. I wish—"

"Nothing ails me," he interrupted.

"I wish you would see a medical man," she pursued. He looked annoyed; "if not for yourself, for your wife," she added.

Mr. Osborne stopped short, and looked at her without speaking.

"She says nothing ails her," continued his stepmother; "but she is dreadfully altered. I thought she was fretting, that there might have arisen between you some misunderstanding a few words from a friend might remove; I said as much yesterday, and was indignantly assured that you were the best of husbands—and that nothing ailed her."

"Well, I dare say nothing does ail her," said Mr. Osborne.

"Then why does she look so dreadfully ill or so wretched?"

She said no more: the door had opened; Adèle had entered. Truly none need tell him that his wife was altered—altered even since the day of the Roche aux Fées. He saw it but too well. Gloomily he gazed at her wan and desolate face.

"Is it possible!" he thought, with the secret indignation of wounded pride and offended love; "is it possible, that a girl, who married me of her own free will, spite some opposition—is it possible that she cannot reconcile herself to being my wife!"

Adèle sat down on the end of a low couch by the fire, and busied herself with the work for which she had gone up to her room; her husband bit his lip and prayed for patience, and finally went and sat down by her. He laid his hand on her shoulder, and looked in her face.

"What ails you?" he asked; "you look unwell."

She gave him searching look no reply, silent or spoken; she merely said:

"I am well; nothing ails me." Then she hesitatingly added,

"Jeannette wants some money, if you please."

"Oh! very well," he coldly answered, and without insisting further about her looks, he rose and left her side. Isabella was in the act of entering the room; he went up to her, passed her handsome bare arm within his, and smiling at her blooming face, he said:

"I wish to speak to you."

Isabella laughed, looked conscious, but resisted gaily.

"Stay with your wife, sir," she said; "she has particular business with you."

Adèle blushed, and nervously said:

"What business should I have with Monsieur Osborne?"

"Monsieur Osborne! How pretty! Well, never mind; you know you want some information from Monsieur Osborne. Lillian asked you to-day in what department of France the Andes were, and you said you would ask Monsieur Osborne."

"He is my only book," replied Adèle, without looking at her husband.

"Then, my dear," said Isabella, "open him at the article Geography, by all means, and learn where the Andes are."

But though Adèle took up the glove, she did so with a playful grace, that pleased her husband well.

"I do not know where the Andes are," she said; "but I know the name of every mountain around Courcelles—and you do not. I know the song of the blackbird from that of the thrush—and you do not. I know every grass, every weed, every flower I see—and you do not. And to crown all, I know where the sun rises and where he sets, and which way the wind blows too—and you do not."

Mr. Osborne thought his wife's justification very pretty, but he observed, smiling:

"All good knowledge, Adèle, but there would be no harm in knowing about the Andes as well."

"I went to the study to ask you," replied Adèle, "but Monsieur Mazois was with you. I stood awhile at the door."

"Listening," suggested Isabella.

"Waiting," replied Adèle; "but he did not go, so I came back with my ignorance. May I go to-morrow?" she asked, glancing at her husband.

"Certainly; Isabella, I must speak to you now."

Isabella allowed herself to be led away. The door closed upon them. Adèle looked at the fire, and smiled. "He has secrets with her," she thought; "I do not mind; but why has he never anything to say to me that none may hear?"

"I am quite ashamed of Isabella's rudeness," said Mrs. Osborne, "but William likes you as you are, whatever he may say. I hope you are sure of that."

"Do you think Isabella had the best of the argument?" asked Adèle.

"No, my dear; and I see it is not that makes you look so

annoyed. My love, you must not mind about the money," continued Mrs. Osborne, sitting down by Adèle, and bending to look in her face; "husbands are so."

Adèle reddened deeply.

"He will give it to Jeannette," she said, "I do not want it; I do not care about it."

"Yes, dear, and you are not used to spend; but it is the confidence one cares for, and I assure you that William—"

"He has given me his name," interrupted Adèle; "I could cover him with ridicule by an act of folly; I could overwhelm him with shame and grief by an act of sin. Why, he must have the deepest confidence in me! Mistrust me in money—mere dust! it is impossible!"

She looked pretty in the loftiness of her denial.

"My dear," said Mrs. Osborne, "I meant to point out that what might seem mistrust in another, is not such in William; but with the run of husbands it is not so; money is gold-dust to them, and they take good care of it; they will trust us with their name and honour; but not with their purse."

"I do not want William's purse," said Adèle, smiling sweetly, "for what is William's is mine; and when I took him, I took his purse too, light or heavy, empty or full."

Mrs. Osborne, too, smiled, and her blue eyes said plainly—"Yes, my love, but you do not know what there is in William's purse."

With a flush of keen pain Adèle turned her face away from that look which vainly tried to be kind, and never could be, even when its owner meant best, and she meant no harm now—anything but heartless and cold.

The door had scarcely closed on Mr. Osborne and his sister when the latter exclaimed—

"William, Adèle will be jealous!"

"What of?" he asked, so coldly that Miss Osborne did not care to pursue the theme.

"Oh, if you look so solemn, I have done!" she said; "where are you taking me to?"

"Only here," he replied, pushing open the door of his study.

They had been walking along a narrow ill-lit passage. They now entered a warm, bright, and solitary room. Isabella sat down in a deep arm-chair, and thence gaily looked at her brother, who, seated opposite her, gravely returned the glance.

"Madame de Launay is coming to-morrow," he said.

"Most oracularly said."

"She wants you for Monsieur de Launay; what answer shall she get?"

Isabella pouted.

"Don't be tiresome, William," she said, "you know it all lies with you."

"With me! my part is over. I saw Monsieur Maxois to-day, and he withdrew satisfied."

"Tell me all!" cried Isabella, with sparkling eyes.

"It was a hard bargain," said Mr. Osborne, smiling sadly, "and the details can scarcely be pleasant to you."

Isabella looked disdainful.

"Monsieur de Launay cannot marry a penniless woman," she said, firmly, "I should despise him as a fool if he did."

"You need not hold him for a fool then," bitterly replied her brother, "for he has shown his sense of your value by the price he set on you. Portion I have none to give you, but he has asked for the partnership, and he has got it."

Isabella jumped up, and threw her arms around her brother's neck.

"You are a darling!" she cried, enthusiastically, "and I am Madame la Baronne. Oh, for a cap, to throw it up!"

Mr. Osborne looked moody.

"You are glad to marry so—really glad," he said.

"Oh, dear! you are going to preach about love," said Isabella, sinking back in her chair. "Why, if I waited for love, who might never come, I might let the best chances slip through my fingers. Give me a gentleman with good manners, a good person, as large a fortune as I can expect, and I am satisfied to marry him. Is it my fault if I am an eagle, and not a dove?"

"Certainly not!" replied her brother, "but you misunderstood me. I am not pleading for love marriages, but I wish for something better than money, nobler than a bargain."

"Nobler than a bargain! You will never be a man of business," she said. "Well, well, I will say no more. I am grateful to you, William, truly grateful, for that thing of the partnership. I do not think you are very fond of my poor Auguste, and I fancy it has gone sorely against the grain."

"You need not be grateful," said her brother, coldly, "nor too glad, either; the partnership and your marriage are but a plank thrown over a pit: our father's house is a falling house—it has dragged me down; take care that it does not drag down your husband too."

Isabella looked blank, but she soon rallied.

"Ah, bah!" she said, "you look at the dark side of things; besides, Auguste will see to that."

"True; and now I have no more to add, save one last warning: for God's sake, Isabella, think well before you marry; nothing is concluded as yet—you have still until to-morrow."

"I never heard anything like it!" exclaimed Isabella, looking amused; "what a pair of turtles you and Adèle must be, though you do not thrive much upon it, either of you. Come, come, do not look so wrathful. I *will* think about it, and I see you want to be alone, so good evening."

And singing gaily a popular song of the day, "*Oui je suis Reine*," Isabella left her brother's study, ran along the passage, and re-entered the Hall, blooming and triumphant, like a rose that has but just opened to the sun.

But her look vainly sought her mother; Mrs. Osborne had gone to sit with her darling upstairs; Adèle sat alone, and was still very busy sewing. Isabella looked at herself graciously in the glass.

"Madame la Baronne looks well," she said.

Adèle did not look up, she had heard nothing. But Isabella felt in a delightful temper.

"What a busy little bee you are," she exclaimed, throwing herself in Anna's chair. "Well, well, I do not think I shall sew much when I am Madame la Baronne."

"Madame la Baronne," slowly repeated Adèle, raising her eyes and looking so amazed that Isabella stared, then sat up, and said with evident surprise,—

"You do not mean to say William has not told you?"

Adèle tried to smile.

"He is so forgetful," she said.

"Oh, you little simpleton!" exclaimed Isabella, seeming quite entertained; "why do you not make him tell you everything? Never mind, I shall be more communicative. You must know, then, that Monsieur de Launay is to be William's partner, and that I am to be the partner of Monsieur de Launay, and that I am to be, as I said, Madame la Baronne. The treaty has been going on this age; the first article was signed yesterday, to-morrow the venerable Madame de Launay comes for the second; the third will come off Heaven knows when. Well, no matter, I shall dance next winter in the Tuileries with His Royal Highness Prince ——. But in waiting I must pay Anna a visit, or be called 'so selfish.'"

And with another glance at Madame la Baronne in the glass, she left the room.

The work of Adèle dropped on her lap, she clasped her trembling hands over it. Her husband was taking a partner, he was giving his sister in marriage; a whole family change, serious and important, was taking place, and she alone ignorant from the beginning, learned it at length, not from his lips, but through the carelessness of one who had never liked and who only endured her, because she saw how little Adèle was in the house of which she had once vainly thought herself mistress.

Alas! gone was the daring mood in which she had so securely vowed to enter her husband's heart. She had had opportunities plenty, and she had availed herself of none; for there is something in a man, even in a husband, which the most daring woman, provided she be not lost to pride, will scarcely brave—his coldness.

Mr. Osborne had over-estimated his power of self-control; with neglect, with unkindness his wife could not tax him, but, alas! he was cold. Adèle had seen it from the day of his return, but she thought at first, "it is only a cloud," and patiently she waited for a breaking that never came. He knew not himself that he was so very much altered, but she did. And if she had not known it, would not the pity and cool neglect of Mrs. Osborne, would not the indifference alternating with rude jests of Isabella, have told her that though her husband forestalled the few wishes she expressed, that though he failed in none of those polite observances which husbands are too apt to neglect, as if the wife were no more the woman—yet he was cold to her, cold from the look of his eye to the touch of his hand.

There is a divine warmth in love which none can mistake. The fire may burn hidden, but the heat is felt if the flame cannot be seen. But though Adèle vaguely felt that whilst Mr. Osborne preserved to her all the forms of love, the spirit was absent; though she remembered a more cordial friend and a fonder husband, still she never once said to herself, "he is no longer fond of me," that would have been too hard to bear, and it was too cruel, too pitiless to imagine. No, she only said, "it is his way." But oh! how long seemed life, how long, and how weary!

Even then, though pained to the very heart by his silence and the triumph it gave to unkind eyes, she could not attribute it to indifference. No, it could not be that; she was still a loved woman, but loved without esteem or trust, loved for her beauty, and for nothing else.

Here the door opened, and Mr. Osborne entered. He came and sat by his wife.

"Well," he said, "and the Andes?"

"Isabella is going to marry Monsieur de Launay," said Adèle, looking at him.

"So she has already told you?"

"Why do you take him for your partner?" pursued Adèle.

"Because I want him," he replied, slightly surprised at the abrupt question.

"Then your affairs are worse?" she persisted.

"Child, I have no affairs; nothing but a tiresome trust; but we will not speak of business."

He had taken her hand, and he was smoothing her hair. Adèle looked at him with mingled passion and grief.

"What am I to him?" she thought; "an ignorant little girl about whose ignorance he does not care—she is pretty, that is enough. A child not fit to spend his money, not worthy to know his secrets or share his cares. Ah! I am his mistress—I am not his wife."

She turned her pained look from his calm countenance; her eyes met her own image in the mirror before her. She saw a pale, sunken face and dim eyes. Pretty! was she pretty now? Oh! no, she was not, and what had Isabella told her that morning: "My dear, man's love and woman's beauty are as long-lived one as the other."

Adèle turned full on her husband.

"I have lost all my good looks, have I not?" she said, smiling.

He replied lightly, that she was only a little pale, and he told her about the Andes. Adèle heard him, with her hand in his, with downcast eyes and aching heart. They were very near on that low couch before that burning fire, with their clasped hands—and Adèle felt immeasurably removed from her husband. She felt as if a deep though narrow river flowed between them; as if they stood on opposite shores hopelessly divided. On one bank she saw him, a man full of mind, knowledge, beauty, and all good gifts; on the other she beheld herself hopelessly sitting, a child, ignorant and untaught, with failing beauty, without power, with nothing but the sacredness of the word wife to charm him. And whilst he talked on unconscious that she was not listening, Adèle bowed her humbled head, and thought of the love she once had had, and wondered if it could not return.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE LADY OF THE HOUSE.

MADAME DE LAUNAY came and went; the hand of Isabella Osborne was asked for and granted, and as that young lady herself would have said, the second article of the treaty was duly signed; but before the conclusion of this important matter, an interlude under the shape of a dinner was thought advisable in the Manor of Courcelles.

Once more the cook from Dijon made his appearance.

"Let them sneer at her if they dare, now," said Jeannette to Jean; "Let Mariette Mazois ask her to be fourteenth guest. She might look brighter, Monsieur Jean, but let the Mazois and the De Launays sneer at the lady of the house."

Jean, who had a literal mind, took some useless trouble in assuring her that no one would think of such a thing.

"What fools men are," muttered Jeannette.

The lady of the house did not seem unconscious of her responsibilities; she had the pale but cool look of one who has to face some unknown peril, but who is resolved to conquer. She spent in Anna's room the whole morning of that eventful day.

Anna was shivering before a blazing fire. Her room was small, cheerful, warm as an oven; but Anna was cold and cross.

"That stupid dinner," she moaned. "Why would you have it?"

"It was Isabella's wish. Do tell me more, Anna; do tell me how to behave."

And Adèle, who stood by Anna's chair, her hand leaning on the back of it, stooped and looked most entreatingly in her sister-in-law's face.

"Be civil and attentive to every one, and you will do," replied Anna, sensibly enough.

"Well, I think I shall," replied Adèle, rising and speaking with some animation; "I should not like him to—but you have not told me what a trapezium is."

"Oh! how my head aches," moaned Anna; "and you are so taken up with Lilian and every one else, that you never come."

"Yes, I do. I come every day, and every day you tell me wonderful things, clever things to make me learned like you. Anna, he must not be ashamed of me,"

"Why do you not ask him, then?"

"Oh! Anna, tell me. I cannot ask him—he would laugh."

Anna moaned.

"If I tell you, will you give up teasing me?"

"I cannot promise that. He has got some new books in English; one on shells, you must help me with it."

Anna groaned.

"You used not to be so," she said, pathetically; "but since Isabella laughed at you about the Andes, you have distracted me. I tell you I cannot bear it."

Adèle threw her arms around her sister's neck, and embraced her with something like passion.

"Oh! do help me to become learned like you," she entreated; "I like study; I could spend days, nights at it. I am glad when he has letters to write, for then I sit up, and he does not know it. Oh! how beautiful conchologia must be."

"I will have nothing to do with it," said Anna, crossly; "my head aches to think how you distracted me all last week about astronomy."

"But do tell me what a trapezium is," urged Adèle; "he was speaking about one to me this morning, and I could not imagine—make haste, Anna, Isabella is coming."

"It has five corners," said Anna.

"I thought it was an insect!"

"An insect! how foolish you are. It is a geometrical figure."

"Ah, how ignorant I am!" thought Adèle; "what must he think of me?"

"What, closeted again with your dear Anna!" said Isabella, entering. "I should be jealous if I were William. But I suppose you are going with him to-morrow?"

She spoke ironically. Mr. Osborne was to depart the next morning, and his wife was, as usual, to remain behind. Adèle was moved with the taunt.

"I have not yet made up my mind," she replied, coolly.

"Namely, you know it is no use; men hate travelling with women."

"I declare she has left the door open," moaned Anna.

"I shall shut it," said Adèle, turning away to leave the room.

"You know you are to come up when you are dressed?" said Anna.

"Yes, yes! Good-bye!" The door closed on her.

"She will look magnificent when she is dressed," observed Isabella, surveying herself in the glass. "She looks like a little

girl ; she has no colour, no spirit, no usage du monde ; she cannot say ten words without betraying the most shameful ignorance. I should be on thorns this evening if I were William."

"You have a very good opinion of yourself," drily said Anna.

"Of course I have. We all have ; and I should be a simpleton indeed if I did not know that I shall have a success to-night, and that Mrs. William Osborne will not be thought much of by the side of the future Baronne."

Anna felt too tired to argue the point. She allowed Isabella to exalt her own beauty, and sneer at Adèle. "Who will look none the worse for it," philosophically thought Anna. Her own opinion was that Adèle would behave and look respectably, and that Isabella would, as usual, be odious and vulgar ; but loving peace and silence, she did not say so.

Adèle dressed Lilian with her own hands ; this being done, and the day being pretty well worn, she called in Madame Leroy, to hold and preside a solemn council on the much-neglected art of the toilet.

"Madame Leroy," she said, gravely, and giving that majestic lady a fixed look, "you told me once that you could make a woman look anything you liked, can it be true ?"

Madame Leroy smiled a majestic and injured smile.

"If Madame had condescended to avail herself of my talents," she modestly replied, "Madame need not now put this question. I can make a woman look anything I choose, always granting her to be docile ; and I will add, that if women only knew their own power in that way, they could all look beautiful, or, at least, lovely, seductive, fascinating."

"But how ?" asked Adèle.

"Madame cannot expect that I should tell her in a few words the arts and secrets of a lifetime. But the first thing necessary is that a woman should be fully determined to be beautiful ; she will end by convincing herself that she is beautiful : let that conviction be but strong and firm in her own mind, and it will inevitably reach other minds ; the world may dispute it at first, but in the end it will give in—'Yes, she is a lovely woman !' The second thing necessary is to think of nothing else than being beautiful. And the third and most important, is an experienced adviser who will teach a woman how to be beautiful."

"Oh, how tiresome it must be !" exclaimed Adèle, looking alarmed.

"It is the labour and the study of a lifetime," austerely replied Madame Leroy, "but it brings its own reward."

"Well, but do tell me a few of the secrets," said her mistress; "I should like to know what you can do?"

"I can give depth to an eye," said Madame Leroy, slightly drawing back; "I can give any style I like to the head; I can alter a shape by the fashion of a dress; I can, by the proper use of colours, do what I like with a complexion."

"Could you make me look handsome this evening?" gravely interrupted Adèle—"very handsome, I mean—brilliantly handsome!"

"Nature has done so much for Madame," graciously replied Madame Leroy, "that under ordinary circumstances nothing would be easier; but Madame is the mistress of the house; she must be simply dressed; it will be more difficult. Still, if Madame will allow me to use a little pink"—Madame Leroy was too civil to employ the ugly word rouge—"I think I can answer."

"No, no," interrupted Adèle, reddening, "I want nothing of the kind."

"Then we will do without it," resolutely said Madame Leroy, like a brave general determined to win the battle *quand même*. But do not expect, oh reader, to learn from these pages the tactics of this able commander. What need you care to know how it was done, when you are told, on good authority, that the battle was won? And do not imagine either that there was anything wonderful in the toilet of Adèle. No, Madame Leroy knew better than that. It was all pure, perfect art, the art that made a Roman lady spend two hours in laying the folds of the toga, the art that is immortalized in the drapery of the Agrippina in the Capitol. But such is human justice; the sculptor gets all the praise. Who thinks of the Madame Leroy of her day, of the tiring woman who gave to that robe of finest wool those soft long folds that breathe the very spirit of grace and womanly dignity?

Adèle said nothing when Madame Leroy's task was over, but her eyes sparkled as she surveyed herself in the glass. She wore a pale sea-green silk, flounced and ample; a profusion of light and beautiful laces, through which glittered a few gold ornaments, softened the tint which needed no subduing. The delicate freshness of a rose bloomed on her cheek; the grace of youth lent enchantment to her aspect; its divine light beamed in her eyes. "Yes," she thought, "he must, he will surely think me handsome." And light and bright as a sunbeam she stole down the staircase, and went to her husband's study. She knocked gently, and opened.

"Come in," he said, looking round.

But Adèle scarcely entered; she was fast losing the primitive innocence of the child, and acquiring the ways of woman.

"I only want to know next whom Madame Mazois is to sit?" she said, gravely.

"You must ask my stepmother; I have no talent that way."

But he rose and looked at her from head to foot, with evidently pleased attention. What sudden magic had effaced sadness from her aspect, and brought back beauty and bloom!

"Look at me!" cried Lillian, bursting in upon them in all the splendour of a white silk frock, with pink garnitures, and not hiding at least that she had come to be admired. "Look at me! am I not beautiful?"

She stood before him on tiptoe with upraised eyes; but though her dark curls, dark eyes, and fair face, made her look very pretty indeed, Mr. Osborne did not flatter his daughter.

"Beautiful! not you; you are pretty well—no more."

"Is mamma beautiful?" asked Lillian.

Mr. Osborne laid his hand on the shoulder of his wife, and surveyed her with smiling pride.

"Why, of course she is," he answered; "you have never seen any lady half so beautiful, have you, Lillian?"

Lillian confessed she had not; but resolutely added, she too would be beautiful when she grew up. She appealed to Adèle; and Mr. Osborne's wife, glad to hide her blushing, happy face, stooped, and kissing Lillian, promised her beauty and everything else she wished for. Suddenly she started back half frightened.

"A carriage!" she cried; "what shall I do?"

"You do not mean to say you are alarmed?" said her husband.

"Alarmed, no! Come, Lillian, come."

She seized the child's hand, and ran out with her. They entered the saloon laughing, and confronted Mrs. Osborne and her daughter. Mrs. Osborne was in black velvet, and she looked a fair, handsome lady. Isabella, arrayed in bridal white, and looking very queenly in a crimson chair, raised her eyes from a book on her lap, gave Adèle a rapid yet amazed glance, then reddened, bit her lip, and resumed her reading.

"My dear child, how charming you look!" graciously observed Mrs. Osborne. "What does William say?"

Lillian clapped her hands, danced about the room, and answered the question.

"Papa says there never has been any lady half so beautiful as mamma," she cried, "and I am to grow up like her."

Isabella threw her book down.

"Insolent little monkey!" she muttered.

"You are not beautiful like mamma," continued Lilian, "you are too big."

Isabella scathed the mischievous little elf with a lightning glance, but Lilian laughed and danced away before Adèle, seriously vexed with her, had time to chide.

"You bring her up well," began Isabella.

She said no more. The door broke open, and Capitaine Joseph burst in on his surprised family with an exuberant and happy "Me voila!" "Here I am."

A light flush rose to Mrs. Osborne's cheek; her eldest son was her best-beloved child; she kissed him with some emotion, and with something like warmth she said,—

"I am glad to see you, Joseph!"

Infinitely cooler was Isabella's welcome. She all but asked what had brought him, but Capitaine Joseph never took anything ill. He smiled happily, and replied emphatically,—

"I came to squeeze the hand of a brother;" he pressed the hand of Mr. Osborne, who had followed him in, and stood by him. "And to find and embrace another sister," he added, gallantly advancing towards Adèle. She stood with Lilian a little in the background. She stepped forward, she gave him her hand, she allowed him to kiss her cheek, and turning to Lilian, she gently said, "Kiss your uncle, Lilian," all so frankly, all so freely, that Capitaine Joseph, though he knew his own merits too well to be surprised, was infinitely charmed. Lilian had gravely raised her face, Capitaine Joseph stooped, brushed her cheek with his yellow moustache, and rising again, he looked at her admiringly, stroked his chin, and turning to Mr. Osborne, he said condescendingly,—

"The beautiful daughter of a more beautiful mother. You remember Horace. Happy man."

And he sighed—no doubt at his solitude.

Isabella's lips curled; Adèle looked at her husband; he was smiling at the misquotation. But as he met her look, the smile died away in bitterness; for there flashed a pale face before him, and he heard the voice of one who wished herself dead a month after her wedding-day.

"I also came," continued Capitaine Joseph, putting and clasping his hands behind his back and facing Isabella, "to have a look at Madame la Baronne."

Madame la Baronne laughed, and gave a look at a glass, and

frankly admired her fine figure and fair head, bound with a wreath of green leaves.

"Joseph, you are tired and hungry," said Mrs. Osborne, anxiously.

"Not at all, mamma; I ate like a wolf at Nantua, and fatigue I know not. I also came," he resumed, confidentially addressing Mr. Osborne, "to decide finally and irrevocably which of the three—hem—you understand."

"You will have the opportunity this very evening," replied Mr. Osborne; "I believe their carriage is coming."

Capitaine Joseph smoothed his moustache, glanced at his uniform bright and neat, and sauntered rather than walked to the broad and deep front window that overlooked the road, in order to see his three divinities alight. Adèle did not move, but looked dreamily at her husband, who stood by the fireplace, scarcely able to conceal his dawning weariness. But he roused himself as the door opened and the Mazois family entered.

Madame Mazois came in, blooming in purple satin, breathless and good-humoured; Monsieur Mazois's legs were hidden by his wife's ample skirts, but unquenched was his front of immaculate white with edge of black coat, and in his dry face and brush-like hair of iron-grey two facts were written, "I have helped to make a match; I have come to eat a dinner." Behind their parents stepped Arthur Mazois and his sisters, in pink as usual; he like a puny twig; they like three bright, stout roses stuck close to him.

"Why are there three of them?" sighed Capitaine Joseph, advancing to greet them. But the Mazois were unapproachable; they were murmuring, laughing, smiling, moving around the young mistress of the house. Its master they scarcely heeded; Mrs. Osborne, Isabella, and Capitaine Joseph they ignored. He only heard such broken speeches as,—

"You are too good—the roads are bad, but with the pleasure of meeting you in view—oh, I remember you so well. How I longed to speak to you on that evening," &c., &c. He only saw black eyes turned up in rapture, and white-gloved hands tenderly clasped, and perfumed handkerchiefs waving prettily around Adèle, with pink skirts and black legs—Arthur was vainly darting in now and then, and smiling feebly at her, whilst he pulled on his gloves, all mingling in inextricable confusion. At length the group broke up; Mrs. Osborne and her daughter were acknowledged, and Capitaine Joseph received his reward. The eldest Mademoiselle Mazois smiled sweetly on him, whilst her

sisters, Louise and Marie, darting looks at the lace sleeves of Adèle, who stood listening to their papa, interjected a whispered criticism.

"Application!" suggested Marie.

"Brussels point," emphatically replied Louise; and they too smiled at their admirer, and reciprocated his kind inquiries.

They were now seated in a row, fanning themselves slowly; Capitaine Joseph stood before them; one hand thrust in the bosom of his coat, the other behind his back.

"Yes," he said, "I have been here seven minutes—no more. I obtained a leave of absence in honour of the occasion. 'General,' I said, 'I must squeeze the hand of my brother, William Osborne; I must meet my sister-in-law, a charming woman.'"

"Enchanting!" breathed the three ladies in one breath.

"I must become acquainted with my future brother, le Baron Auguste de Launay—give me three days and a-half. A day and a-half to go, half a day to stay, a day and a-half to come back."

"Then you go to-morrow?" said Louise Mazois, whilst Marie stealthily used her eye-glass, and gave another look at the sleeves of Adèle.

"At twenty minutes past five," began Capitaine Joseph, "I leave Courcelles, and ——"

A slight stir made him turn round; the wide folding-doors had flown open: on the threshold stood a tall, stylish, fair man, who seemed stepping out of the last book of fashions, and leaning on his arm, a little brown old lady in a shabby silk and huge dowager cap trimmed with yellow ribbons.

"Monsieur le Baron de Launay, Madame de Launay," sententially said Jean.

"Poor Isabella! What an aunt!" thought Capitaine Joseph.

The three beauties on the couch had to raise their fans to conceal ironical smiles.

But no diffidence concerning her personal appearance disturbed the satisfaction of Madame de Launay; she nodded all round with good-humoured impertinence, and took a pinch of snuff with an air that implied: "Good people, I could buy you every one, if I chose; and as to this Manor of Courcelles, why, I could put it in my pocket, if I chose too."

But she was civil, very civil; to Adèle and Isabella especially. She looked up at one critically, and down at the other approvingly, and took another pinch of snuff.

"Come and see me," she said, patting the cheek of Mr.

Osborne's wife, "and bring your sister with you," she added, nodding at Isabella; and without waiting for the reply of either—she had the unconscious insolence of one whom the world had spoiled—she turned away, and found herself opposite Mr. Osborne.

"You have a pretty wife," she said. "I wanted her."

Mr. Osborne measured his future partner—Auguste was a shadow—with his eye, and said briefly:

"You wanted her?"

"For Auguste; I have always had a fancy for Courcelles; but I thought her too young, and whilst I was waiting, you stepped in and took her. But you have made the loss good," she added, turning graciously to Isabella, who had heard her with silent wrath, "so I must not complain. *Mon Dieu* Monsieur Osborne, how hard your chairs are!" she added, moving restlessly in the softest chair in the room; "if I only had a stool. Why, there is one, my dear," to Isabella; "may I trouble you to push it to me. I am an old woman, you know."

The haughty Isabella pushed the stool, and Madame de Launay taking another pinch of snuff, gave her a long wicked look of her little black eyes. Mr. Osborne smiled bitterly. Galled to the quick by her strange, frank insolence, he felt what a bitter thing it is to have to lean on strength not our own.

But the dinner-bell rang; he gave Madame de Launay his arm; her nephew offered his to Adèle; Monsieur Mazois supported Mrs. Osborne; Capitaine Joseph belonged to Madame Mazois; Isabella fell to Arthur; there ought of course to have been more gentlemen; but it was a strictly private dinner; business was not to be discussed, indeed; but the forthcoming marriage was to be announced, and a wider circle would have been an objection.

The repast was long, hot, and fatiguing, as dinners always are; yet it was a perfect tilt between Mr. Osborne and his neighbour, the woman of business. Angular, capricious, shrewd, and impertinent, he found her. At first he resisted her courteously, but perceiving that she delighted in battle, he dropped even the most polite antagonism, and by letting her have her way, he fairly conquered her. She immediately fastened on Capitaine Joseph, her other neighbour; and Mr. Osborne amused himself with looking at his wife. To his surprise, he saw her preside at his table with an amount of dignity, of lady-like grace, of happy vivacity, for which he would have given her, without that evidence, no credit. He was astonished and pleased, too, and he

probably looked as he felt; for every time Adèle met his eye, her cheek flushed, and her look lit. Signs of fatigue she showed none; and when the dinner was at length over, when Monsieur Masois had proposed two toasts, one of which the Baron acknowledged with his hand on his heart, and his fair, perfumed head low bent—Mr. Osborne had, to his horror, to answer the second in behalf of Isabella—when, in short, even the dessert was despatched, Adèle looked as blooming as a rose in June.

The guests adjourned to the drawing-room; at once Adèle made her way to her husband.

"Well," she said, "how did I behave?"

"Admirably!" he replied.

Her face beamed with joy, and with a low, triumphant laugh she turned away. Mr. Osborne watched her curiously. From where he stood by the marble mantelpiece he commanded a full view of the whole apartment.

It was a large, warm, red room. The furniture was substantial, though ancient; the mirrors, narrow and rather dark, reflected with sufficient brilliancy every wax light; the heavy, hanging curtains indicated where windows opened on the wintry landscape without; they told about it, but excluded it securely; the wind might blow in the mountains, here it was warm and pleasant; and with a roar, as if rejoicing to burn, large brown logs blazed on the hearth, and lit up every object, from the flowers scattered in the pattern of the carpet, to the flushed faces of the guests. Truly pleasant are such warm, well-lit rooms, with smooth, rosy gentlemen in immaculate black and white, with soft, delicate ladies on whose fair faces and plump shoulders the red firelight shines, pleasant are they with the rustling of silken robes, the creaking of shining boots, the music of low laughers, the subdued talk, the hum of various sounds, the pretty speeches. Ah, very pleasant had Adèle thought that they must be on the day when she sat in the orchard tossing apples, forgotten and excluded. But now she had entered the charmed circle, not merely to enjoy, but to rule, and she ruled like one born to the task. Mr. Osborne watched her closely; he was not dazzled, but he felt the change. Adèle was no more a child; that elegantly attired lady, graceful in her vivacity, was not the abrupt half-wild girl of sixteen; the little thing in the brown frock and white collar whom no one had minded, was gone; he saw a beautiful and young woman, to whom every one now paid assiduous court. Monsieur Mazois and Madame de Launay were playing at chess in a corner; but the game paused,

their faces relaxed and smiled, when Adèle went near them. Monsieur de Launay sat between Isabella, who watched him like a cat, and Louise Mazois; but his look followed the mistress of the house wherever she went. Arthur Mazois and his sisters looked ardent; Capitaine Joseph was devoted; and Mrs. Osborne, forgotten and neglected, sat by Madame Mazois, who was fast asleep in her arm-chair. "How the little thing likes it," thought Mr. Osborne, as he heard the gay, light laugh of Adèle. She stood near Monsieur de Launay, listening with an amused face to some flowery speech of his, and looking so happy, though not at all through him, that her husband smiled. It was the first time he had seen and heard her so gay since their marriage. Capitaine Joseph stepped across the carpet, planted himself on the rug, turned his back to the fire, lifted the tails of his coat, and disturbed the reverie of his half-brother by observing—

"William, I am more perplexed than ever."

"Indeed," said Mr. Osborne, looking down at him.

"Indeed I am. I wish they would not sit so near one another, or be so much alike," continued Capitaine Joseph, casting a meditative look at the three daughters of Monsieur Mazois; "but they have the same straight noses, the same black eyes, the same red cheeks and redder lips, and pray how is a man to make up his mind? Besides that, when I am away from them, the three mix themselves up into one."

"It is a trying case," said Mr. Osborne.

Capitaine Joseph shook his head, and nodding over at Adèle, feelingly exclaimed,—

"Ah, you were lucky, and even more wise than lucky; but sly, decidedly sly, advising me, I remember, to try my fortune there, knowing well enough that I had not a fair chance. Well, well, I am forgiving and not envious; be happy in peace, Madame Osborne looks very lovely this evening; she is decidedly the prettiest woman present," he added, raising his eye-glass and casting a critical glance around the room.

"Isabella looks well," drily said Mr. Osborne.

"Isabella is a fine woman," replied Capitaine Joseph; "but there is rather too much of her, and she can no more compare with Madame Osborne than——" here the Capitaine paused at a loss for a comparison.

"Than what?" asked the voice of Isabella.

Capitaine Joseph gave a start, and saw on the hearth before him the stately figure of Isabella, pale, irate, a fair-haired Nemesis, breathing revenge in her very looks. Mr. Osborne smiled and quietly walked off, leaving his unlucky brother to his fate.

"Than a servant maid is like a queen, I suppose," said Isabella, with cutting sarcasm; "truly, I have good cause to remember this evening. My future aunt does me the honour of informing me that she would have liked my sister-in-law for her niece; but that I have at least one recommendation: I am the sister-in-law of that peerless lady."

Capitaine Joseph shrugged his shoulders.

"Blame yourself. You were rude to Madame de Launay, and Madame de Launay, who is rich and accustomed to flattery, is rude to you."

"The whole Mazois tribe are at her feet," irefully continued Isabella; "it is not worship, it is adoration."

"The lady of the house," began Capitaine Joseph.

"And my brother," interrupted Isabella, giving him a look that made Capitaine Joseph feel very uncomfortable; "congratulates that happy man, her husband, on having so beautiful a wife, so much more beautiful than his poor sister. I should not at all wonder if Monsieur de Launay were not of the same opinion," she added, with some gloom; "he is very attentive to the lady of the house, is he not? But can he do less?"

Capitaine Joseph shrugged his shoulders again, but he certainly could not help noticing that Monsieur de Launay, who now sat near Adèle, was almost more assiduous than politeness required; he nevertheless ventured to remark that good taste forbade the Baron to be too much with his future bride. A remark which Isabella received with a superb curl of the lip, but at the same time, and to her brother's infinite relief, she walked away.

"Isabella is a fine girl," thought Capitaine Joseph, "but she has an awful temper. I mistrust fair women with their golden hair; no, dark hair, blue eyes," he thought, looking at Adèle; but remembering it was useless to look that way, he mentally substituted black eyes to blue, and returned to his happy contemplation of the three blooming beauties on the couch.

"Are you not rather hot?" asked the voice of Adèle.

He looked up; she was standing on the spot her husband occupied when she unconsciously caused the luckless comparison which Capitaine Joseph began and Isabella wrathfully finished. The brow of Capitaine Joseph cleared, he smiled; he liked pretty faces, and the face he now looked at was both pleasant and pretty.

"Not too hot," he said benignantly.

"You are a salamander," observed Monsieur de Launay, appearing by the side of Adèle.

Capitaine Joseph was by no means charmed with his future

brother-in-law : he found him insufferably vain, disgracefully conceited. He thought moreover that Monsieur de Launay might have paid a little more attention to Isabella and a little less to Adèle; he now undertook to put him down : as men do put each other down very kindly—and with that praiseworthy purpose, he said :

"Our costume is too hot. There is no doubt about it; and moreover, it does not suit us at all. It is English, and an Englishman alone knows how to wear it. Do you know," he added, looking up most impertinently at Monsieur de Launay, "do you know anything more absurd, more ridiculous than the lively, vivacious, impulsive Frenchman attempting to mimic the cool, gentlemanlike Englishman! I repeat it: the Englishman alone in our modern days knows how to dress well; I do not say his costume is handsome, but I say it is his, and that he alone can wear it."

Monsieur de Launay reddened slightly; but he was too well bred to take up the glove; he merely said :

"You are severe."

"I am true : now look at Osborne. He is carelessly dressed ; quite so ; yet somehow or other he looks as you and I will never look, if we try ever so much to imitate that cool negligence ; that superiority which is not conscious, and yet must needs be confessed. It sits well on him—on us," perfidiously added Capitaine Joseph, who was French from top to toe, and whom the wildest imagination could not accuse of Anglo-mania, "on us, my dear fellow, it would be supremely ridiculous."

But Monsieur de Launay would not be offended.

"Well, we do not dress well, that is true enough," he said good-humouredly ; "but our women do;" a soft, complimentary look to Adèle ; "and though English ladies can equal them," he saw Isabella approaching, "it is not in their power to surpass."

"You actually allow us equality," said Isabella, confronting him ; but Monsieur de Launay would not be daunted for all her stern looks. Most courteously, most graciously he reiterated his assertion, though he skilfully verged off into a little dissertation on the toilet, which might have reminded Adèle of Madame Leroy, had she been listening.

But she was not ; she was looking at her husband and smiling wistfully at her own thoughts. He sat by the elder of the Mesdemoiselles Mazois, talking to her quietly enough, but smiling at her lively replies. "Yes," thought Adèle, "they see the cool negligence, the unconscious superiority, but how idly they talk ; how blind they must be not to see that these peculiarities are his

essentially; that no one could attempt imitating them, no, not more than his handsome face and his elegant carriage. Who is—who could be like Monsieur Osborne?"

Monsieur de Launay had gone off with his ladylove; Capitaine Joseph, who still stood by Adèle, saw the direction her looks took, and gently pitied her blindness. It was very pretty to see a young wife smitten with her husband; but what could she see in that tall, stiff, awkward Englishman to doat on! He undertook to divert her attention to a more worthy object; he succeeded; Adèle looked and listened; then with a start exclaimed:

"Monsieur Osborne is gone—and I wanted him!"

"He has vanished," replied Capitaine Joseph, vainly looking round the room; "shall I go and look for him?" he promptly added.

"I shall be so much obliged to you," said Adèle, with a gracious smile; "but do not say I want him—only tell me where he is."

"Decidedly, I ought to have married her," thought Capitaine Joseph, walking away; "she is a sweet woman, and I do not think that great booby cares much about her."

Adèle leaned her elbow on the mantelpiece, and turning towards the fire, saw her own image in the glass.

Her eyes laughed, her colour deepened, her lips parted in a smile. She saw well enough that she was pretty, and very pretty.

What else had every one been telling her, if not in words, yet in a hundred ways, the whole evening? Isabella and her husband had alone been silent. About Isabella Adèle did not think, but about her husband she did. "Why was he looking at me so much?" she thought, with a beating heart; "did I say or do anything that displeased him, or did he, like Capitaine Joseph, like Monsieur de Launay, like everyone else, admire me? Why should he not? If he married me for my beauty, why not like me best when I look best?"

"My dear child, I congratulate you," said the bland voice of Mrs. Osborne; "you have had quite a triumph, and our dear William must be really pleased."

Adèle turned round and smiled at her handsome mother-in-law. Mrs. Osborne had been sadly, cruelly neglected that day; but though she could not like it, she was too much a woman of the world not to take this as a matter of course, and not to hasten and pay all due homage to the rising star.

"But I hope," she resumed, "that William does not persist in his intended journey. It is snowing."

"Snowing!" exclaimed Adèle, in a tone of concern; "how unfortunate."

"In the recess," whispered Capitaine Joseph, in a voice which Adèle alone could hear, as he passed by her.

Her look thanked him as much for his ready wit and discretion as for his officiousness, and she waited for an opportunity to slip away. He gave her one, by engaging his mother in close discourse, during which Adèle, first giving a rapid, half-daring, half-shy look at her image in the glass, vanished.

Mr. Osborne stood by the table where he had found Adèle sitting alone on the evening of Mrs. Osborne's dinner. He was turning over a portfolio in search of a sketch which he wished to show to Mademoiselle Mazois, when a white hand drew aside the heavy drapery that divided him from the presence of the guests, a blooming face appeared, and finally, the slight but graceful form of his wife stood clear and bright on that sombre background. A moment she paused, then she came forward and stood by his side. She, too, remembered that evening, and as she remembered it, she smiled in his face.

"Am I like the little girl in the brown frock?" she asked—"the little girl whom no one minded until a kind friend came and sat by her, spoke to her, and even tried to amuse her, when no one else would have given her a look? Am I like her?"

"You are not unlike her to-night," he replied, quietly; "there are days when I wish you had more of her free, happy looks."

He had often spoken before of her altered appearance; never once of her sadness. Adèle was disconcerted, but only for a moment.

"Looks!" she said, "what are looks? I cannot take hold of them," she added, closing her hand upon air, "and if I go into the conservatory, I can take hold of the flowers, of my beautiful bird, and of this," she added, raising her silk skirt, "and of that," she continued, touching the gold bracelet that encircled her round, white arm; "and I can take hold of you," she concluded, lightly clasping his arm, "of you, to whom I owe it all—flowers, bird, silk dress, bracelet, polite speeches, everything!—of you who are your own best gift."

Sweet was this tender flattery, but it did not convince him.

"This is rank materialism," said Mr. Osborne, gravely; "I am more spiritual; I think a great deal of looks, and I like happy looks."

The colour of Adèle deepened beneath his fixed gaze; she

withdrew her hand; she put it back; and at length she said, a little tartly—

“What matter about past looks? I dare say there was good reason for them; present looks are a great deal more to the purpose; and if they tell you or any one else that I am not happy this evening, they tell an untruth.”

And she looked so smiling and so happy as she said it, that at once his brow cleared, and his eye softened.

“I have only one wish,” continued Adèle, doubtfully, “a wish which only you can gratify. Ah, if you would—if I only knew how to ask so as not to be refused!—how to entreat without teasing—ah, how happy I should be!”

Her eyes sparkled with the eagerness of desire; her lips were parted with doubtful, hesitating grace; her whole aspect had the frank and charming openness of an entreating child that is neither ashamed of wishing nor of asking, and only afraid of being denied. He was strangely moved. As she was that evening, he had never seen her since their marriage.

He took her other hand, and raised it to his lips.

“Ask whatever you wish for,” he said, “and if my power goes so far, you shall have it.”

The heart of Adèle beat with joy.

“Take me with you to-morrow,” she said.

“Impossible!” he exclaimed, with a start.

“Impossible! I have your word, and I dare you to break it.”

He led her to the conservatory, and thence he showed her mountains and paths white with snow.

“I do not care,” wilfully said Adèle, “I will go with you to-morrow.”

He was sorry to have promised; he was pleased, spite of himself, at her fond persistency. He looked down at her to remonstrate and argue, but Adèle shook her head, and laughed in his face.

“I have your word,” she said, “and I dare you to break it; besides, my mind has long been made up to go; my trunk has been packed this week.”

Mr. Osborne bent his look full on her flushed face. Was that why Adèle had not for the last week looked either so sad or so pale? Was it possible, could it be, that his childish young wife liked him better than he thought? But suddenly Adèle averted her burning face, and without word or warning she was gone. Scarcely had the drapery closed upon her, when he heard her

light voice, and joyous, though low, laugh in the drawing-room. Scarcely had he himself passed the threshold of the recess, when he saw her talking to old Monsieur Mazois. Her eyes sparkled with delight; her cheeks were bright and warm; radiant and triumphant was her whole aspect, and beautiful, more beautiful by far than under the old lime-tree on her wedding morn. Swift and invading as fire there ran a subtle thought through Mr. Osborne's whole being—"His wife loved him."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

EXPLANATIONS.

ISABELLA sat alone by a small table, turning over the pages of a keepsake. Monsieur Mazois had for a few moments claimed the attention of Monsieur de Launay; with some alarm Mrs. Osborne noticed the angry brow and sullen looks of her daughter. She stepped over to her, and, bending over her chair, she whispered, remonstratively—

"Do not look so, my dearest child; it will be noticed and commented upon."

Moodily Isabella raised her eyes and gazed on the room.

"I am used to look as I feel," she said.

"Yes, dear, I know you are truthful—too truthful, by far, I fear, for your happiness."

She sighed softly, but produced no visible relaxing of her daughter's rigid features.

"Incorrigible donkey," she thought. "His aunt has already been talking of it to me; if she sees her now, all is over."

But Madame de Launay was too busy talking with her nephew and Monsieur Mazois to heed Isabella's looks. Bitterly that young lady smiled, and bitterly she said,—

"Is William mad this evening, or has the universal fascination reached him? I declare he cannot take his eyes off his wife. Look at him! no lover of twenty ever seemed more smitten. Miserable infatuation!"

Her tone was getting deeper and more tragic. Her mother knew her quite capable of quarrelling publicly either with her brother or with her betrothed; and she prudently got out of the

storm she could not avert, and walking away, left the fair Isabella to her pleasant meditation. Her daughter saw her go over to Mr. Osborne and whisper something, whilst she looked at Adèle.

"Ay, fawn, flatter," indignantly thought Isabella; "tell your stepson to look at his lovely wife and see how beautiful she looks, the most lovely woman present, of course. Little flattery from me shall either hear to-night."

Her thoughts proceeded no further; Mrs. Osborne had left her stepson to go over to the three daughters of Monsieur Mazois, and Adèle availed herself of the breaking of the group between Monsieur and Madame de Launay and Monsieur Mazois to slip out of the room. Scarcely had the door closed upon her, when it opened and closed again. She turned round and saw her husband.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"Upstairs to Anna. I promised to go and see her when I was dressed, and I forgot it."

"I have a few words to say to you," said Mr. Osborne; "come in here with me."

There was a slight and unusual flush on his cheek; his look was clear, firm, and full; the hold of his hand on her bare arm was gentle, but not to be resisted. He opened a door; they entered a quiet and silent room; a lamp burned on the marble mantelpiece, and shed its glow on the smooth green baize of a billiard-table. Without giving her time to think, Mr. Osborne entered abruptly on the subject:

"You cannot come with me to-morrow," he said briefly.

Adèle started.

"Why so?" she asked.

"It is too cold."

"I do not mind the cold," she said, half angrily. "I have your word—I will go with you."

Mr. Osborne smiled.

"What do you want to come with me for?" he asked coolly.

Tears rose to her eyes, but he remained unmoved. He thought himself beloved, and at once became a despot.

"What have I done to be so treated?" asked Adèle with some passion; "what have I done?"

"You have wished yourself dead a month after your wedding day," replied her husband. He sat down and looked at her like a judge, calm without severity.

The colour forsook the cheek of Adèle; she leaned her hand

on the table; she shook from head to foot: then suddenly she slipped down on the floor at his feet.

"Get up, Adèle," said Mr. Osborne, reddening, "you have misunderstood me. I did not speak in anger; I stated a sad truth. Rise, you pain me."

But in vain he attempted to raise her. Her arms were clasped around him, her face looked up at him half ashamed, half smiling, her fond, humble obstinacy resisted all his efforts.

"Is that why you were so cold?" she asked; "oh! if I had only known it! Let me stay here. Do you think it humbles me? not a bit. I know you are fond of me. So you heard me saying those mad, wicked words? Do not ask me why I said them. I knew it then—I do not know it now. I only know that I am proud and happy to be your wife."

"Are you sure of that?" asked Mr. Osborne, with some emotion.

She laughed at the question.

"Are not you?" she replied, saucily.

He looked down at her; steadily her raised eyes met his. Beautiful, bewitching, was her whole aspect; enchanting was the thought that this bright young creature had at length set her joy in loving him. A deeper flush rose to his cheek; he raised her; he clasped her to his breast, and Adèle threw her arms around his neck, and, embracing him joyously, she cried, in the triumph of her heart,—

"I have got him back; I have got him back—and now let me go—I want to see Anna, let me go."

But he did not let her go. He could not weary of her beaming face. She saw his fond look, and again she laughed consciously.

"You like me, you admire me," she said; "but it is only your goodness that sees anything in me—I am not worthy of you; but I mean to be. I am only a little girl—I shall be a woman; I am only pretty—I shall grow beautiful; I am only clever—I shall be learned—and all in order that you may like me more and more."

Mr. Osborne knew not what to think of a fondness so sudden and so free; so unlike love in its freedom, so like it in its tenderness; but he saw that his wife was bent on charming him, and he let himself be charmed to her heart's content. He was too fond of her to be proud, and a great deal too wise to question. For a while Adèle triumphed freely; then a sudden prick of conscience urged her to exclaim:

"Ah! how much you like me! How much you must have

liked me, to marry me, a foolish, ignorant little girl. Tell me what it was that pleased you so much in me—tell me, that I may please you thus forever.”

But Mr. Osborne, instead of replying, reddened a little, and, rising from his chair, gently put his wife away. The door had opened; Capitaine Joseph and Monsieur Mazois stood on the threshold of the room.

“Pray come in,” gravely said Mr. Osborne.

They entered; Adèle bent her flushed face as she passed by them, then closed the door and vanished.

“You were looking for me,” said Mr. Osborne.

“Yes,” said Capitaine Joseph, “we were.”

They drew chairs forward and sat down around the fire; Monsieur Mazois looked embarrassed; Mr. Osborne quietly expecting; Capitaine Joseph coughed, with a dubious look at his half-brother, and at length began:

“You will be sorry to learn that our friend Mazois has sustained a heavy loss.”

“Indeed!” said Mr. Osborne, looking concerned.

“I got the news through Madame de Launay,” put in Monsieur Mazois, looking as if he thought himself safe in making that remark. “She knows everything, you know. It seems she had been expecting it for some time. So she had left orders that as soon as the news came it was to be brought to her, and ten minutes ago she received it.”

Monsieur Mazois spoke in his usual slow, flurried tone; but Mr. Osborne was too courteous to betray any impatience; he merely said:

“Yes, Madame de Launay is a good man of business; I am going away to-morrow, as you know, but if I can be of any use to you, pray say so.”

Monsieur Mazois looked considerably embarrassed, and gave Capitaine Joseph an appealing glance.

“The fact is,” said Capitaine Joseph, rubbing his chin as he looked at his brother, “the fact is, my dear fellow, that you are a greater sufferer than Mazois; Dubois and Compagnie have failed.”

Mr. Osborne gave a start and bit his lip, but he promptly recovered, and merely saying, “I am very much obliged to you for the timely information,” he seemed to think no more about it. Capitaine Joseph looked at Monsieur Mazois, who gave him a nod, and, thus encouraged and urged, he spoke:

“You are a man of business, William, and though you married

a lovely woman for nothing but love, you know enough of the world to be aware that such is not the usual case. And I am sorry to say that Madame de Launay takes that failure of Dubois and Compagnie in rather a serious point of view. She seems to think that it quite alters the matter of the partnership."

"And consequently of the marriage," interrupted Mr. Osborne, rising and looking indignant; "I thought Monsieur de Launay was a man of honour."

"My dear fellow, what has he to do with it?" said Capitaine Joseph: "you know very well that his aunt is your real partner, and if she chooses to consider that this failure alters the advantages of the partnership, what can poor Auguste do?"

"What can he do?" angrily asked Mr. Osborne; "why, he need not have asked my sister in marriage unless he was prepared at all risks to marry her. Is it any fault of hers if Dubois and Compagnie have failed?"

"Excuse me," put in Monsieur Mazois; "the marriage was conditional on the partnership, and the partnership on certain advantages that exist no more."

Mr. Osborne did not answer.

"It was a bargain," observed Capitaine Joseph, very coolly, "and unless we can observe our share of it, why should we expect the other party to observe his? Let Baron de Launay," he added, twirling his moustache and looking fiercely at Monsieur Mazois, who deprecatingly lifted up his hands, "let him, I say, but hint that our sister Isabella Osborne has any personal or mental defect that makes him withdraw from this engagement—and he will have some one to call him to account. But, as it is," he continued, resuming the pacific tone, "no reasonable person can blame him. And all we have to do is to get out of it with honour: that is to say, to open the matter ourselves, and inform Madame de Launay and her nephew, that under the altered circumstances, we would rather have neither partnership nor marriage. Thus the little *amour propre* of Isabella will be spared, Monsieur de Launay will not be placed in a very awkward and unpleasant position, and it will only be what happens every day in the world; a broken match."

"You are right, and I was wrong," replied Mr. Osborne, who had calmed down, and could take a cooler view of the case; "it was, as you say, a mere bargain; and if I cannot keep my share in it, why expect miracles of disinterestedness from a man whose marriage is strictly commercial? Let it be; it is, as you say, a broken match."

Monsieur Mazois and Capitaine Joseph rose, both glad and relieved to find their ungracious task safely over. As they were leaving the room, Mr. Osborne said to his half-brother—

"I shall stay here awhile; do me the favour of sending Isabella in to me. It is but right that she should know all at once."

"Ma foi, I would rather he had the telling of it than I," thought Capitaine Joseph, with a shrug.

But he fulfilled his errand, for in a few moments after the door of the billiard-room had closed upon him, it opened again, and Isabella entered, surprised and stately.

"Poor girl!" thought Mr. Osborne, "it is a cruel blow; the scheming of a year to end thus!"

"Well, sir, what have you got to say to me?" asked Isabella, a little shortly.

She stood on the hearth by him; he passed his arm around her, and drew her to his side.

"Be strong and firm," he said kindly, "I have bad news for you."

She thought he was jesting, but a look of her eyes into his—they were nearly of the same height—told her he was not.

"Speak at once," she said, impatiently.

Mr. Osborne held it as indubitable that what is called preparing people is ten times worse than the worst reality: he softened nothing.

"Dubois and Compagnie have failed," he said; "I am the heaviest loser: the partnership is at an end, and with it your marriage. The De Launays expect me to withdraw; I must, in honour; I must, too, in common prudence, for if I do not, they will."

But he had over-estimated Isabella's strength; the blow was too great; pale, inanimate, she sank on the chair which Capitaine Joseph had recently occupied, and seemed unable to breathe, feel, or speak. Her brother thought she was fainting, and extended his hand to ring the bell, but she recovered sufficiently to arrest his arm.

"It will soon be over," she said; "do not ring; make no éclat, for Heaven's sake; let my shame be hidden at least."

And laying her head on the billiard-table, she burst into a flood of tears. Mr. Osborne allowed them to flow awhile; but when that first passion had ceased, he sat down by her, and administered the best consolation he could think of.

"You are eighteen," he said, "handsome and clever. Let but this unfortunate business rally, and I will make you marry something better than Auguste de Launay."

"And do you think I regret him?" cried Isabella, with flashing eyes; "no, let him go. What I feel," she added, laying her hand on her heaving bosom, "is the shame, the mortification, the cruel, the bitter humiliation of a rejected woman—for rejected I am—I know it—you know it—to the whole world it will go forth—she has been rejected."

Her sincerity moved her brother; he liked her for that and for her own liking for him, to which he was not blind; truly was he sorry for her grief. He drew her to his side, and embraced her with more affection than he had ever shown before. But what man can love one woman, and not like other women more for her sake? That fondness for his wife which Isabella had so resentfully noticed that evening, was nevertheless the best friend she had ever had in her brother's heart.

"Come," he said, kindly wiping away her tears with her cambric handkerchief, "do not fret; I can promise nothing; but send in Capitaine Joseph to me, and we shall see what can be done to make you Madame la Baronne yet."

The eyes of Isabella sparkled; she kissed her brother, gave herself a look in the glass; and, satisfied that her heightened colour would sufficiently hide her recent tears, she bounded out of the room. In a second Capitaine Joseph entered it.

"Are you a magician?" he asked. "What ails Isabella? she looks beaming with joy."

Mr. Osborne smiled.

"I have no time for explanation," he said; "but do me the favour of saying to Monsieur and Madame de Launay, that I have an important communication to make to them. If they will have the kindness of stepping into the recess in the drawing-room, I shall seek them there."

"You would be more out of hearing here," said Capitaine Joseph.

"I cannot ask a lady to come to me, nor yet to enter a billiard-room, can I?"

Capitaine Joseph thought that Madame de Launay was more man than woman, but he did not say so, but he thought and he said, too, that, considering what sharp people of business the De Launays showed themselves, so much punctiliousness was scarcely necessary.

"I would not say so opposite Mazois," he added; "but, entre nous, they have acted but a poor, paltry part; and though it is impossible to resent it, it is quite possible to despise it."

For once Mr. Osborne agreed with his half-brother, but his

punctiliousness, instead of lessening, increased. He began to think it might not be quite courteous enough to send a message; to Capitaine Joseph's great surprise he retracted it, and said that he would himself be the bearer of his request.

"There is no making him out," thought Capitaine Joseph, following his half-brother out of the billiard-room. When he entered the saloon, Mr. Osborne was already by Madame de Launay's chair. She gave him a sagacious nod in reply to something which he said, looked at Auguste, who seemed in a very uncomfortable state of mind, and followed by her nephew, the woman of business rose and walked to the recess. Mr. Osborne entered it last. The drapery dropped upon him, Isabella sat by Madame Mazois, and had the pleasure of being kindly asked by that happy lady when the wedding would take place.

"Poor girl—very unpleasant for her," thought Capitaine Joseph, walking away so as not to hear the reply, but he could not help looking at her; the colour had fled from Isabella's cheeks, and her eager, glittering eyes were fixed with feverish impatience on the curtain behind which her fate was being decided. "A very uncomfortable position," thought Capitaine Joseph, and he kindly resolved never to place in that awkward and unpleasant position that one of the three Mesdemoiselles Mazois whom he was to marry.

They sat behind the drapery, Madame de Launay dry, withered, business-like, tapping her snuff-box and taking a pinch of snuff with perfect unconcern, Auguste de Launay pale and silent, and Mr. Osborne, who alone spoke, quiet and collected as usual. He had at once entered upon business, and laid before them the full extent of his losses.

"Under these altered circumstances," he calmly added, "there is but one course open to me: to release Monsieur de Launay from the partnership."

"Good,—very good," put in Madame de Launay, approvingly. "I knew Monsieur Osborne was too much a man of business and a man of honour not to understand that matters were quite altered."

She looked hard at her nephew, who did not venture to open his lips, but seemed on thorns. Unmoved with her praise, Mr. Osborne resumed from where he had been interrupted.

"And to withdraw my consent to his marriage with my sister. I cannot allow her to enter a family to which she could no longer bring as much as she would receive."

Monsieur de Launay slapped his forehead like one distracted,

and rose and walked about the room, but his aunt nodded more approvingly than before. She had never much liked the alliance, she did not like Mrs. Osborne, she disliked Isabella, they were decidedly well out of it. Still she uttered a few words of polite regret, it was only proper, and Madame de Launay knew how to do things. But to her surprise and displeasure her nephew came forward and agitatedly exclaimed,—

"I cannot—no, I really cannot give up Mademoiselle Osborne in this way; my affections are engaged, my word is passed."

Here he paused, silenced by the quiet look his aunt gave him.

"Well," she said, very calmly, "why do you not go on, Auguste? Your word is passed, you say—what next?"

In vain he looked imploring; she remained inexorable, and took a pinch of snuff; Mr. Osborne looked at them and smiled: this was the opportunity he wanted.

"I understand and respect your scruples," he said, addressing Monsieur de Launay; "but I, too, have mine, and there is only one condition on which you can, with my consent, at least, marry my sister; it is, that instead of the partnership, or rather in addition to it, you will take with Isabella such a portion as shall, in the estimation of your mutual friend, Monsieur Mazois, more than balance the loss of to-day."

A dead silence followed his words; Monsieur de Launay coloured violently, his aunt took a long pinch of snuff. She was the first to speak.

"Business is business," she said; "excuse my asking how you can portion your sister when you are so heavy a loser?"

"Because apart from that embarrassed though large property which I have received from my father as a trust for his family, and not at all for my own use, I am master of another distinct fortune derived from my mother, and of course my own entirely. It is out of that fortune that I shall portion my sister."

"You have a child," said Madame de Launay, taking another pinch of snuff.

"My daughter will be too rich for her happiness," quietly replied Mr. Osborne; "she will be rich—a great deal too rich."

"You may have more children."

"I may or I may not; but even if I have, those children yet unborn will enjoy what you call in French 'hopes' *des esperances*; I have plenty of wealthy relatives, whose inheritance I may never live to reap, but whose property will ultimately fall in to my descendants,—if I have any," he added, smiling.

"Pray let us say no more about it," chivalrously cried Monsieur

de Launay; "I shall be but too happy to obtain the hand of Mademoiselle Osborne, no matter on what conditions."

Madame de Launay took another pinch of snuff, and nodded in a way that implied, "I am his aunt, you know; it is he who marries, not I—let him please himself." But internally that sagacious lady thought, "If he had the wealth of Croesus he is none the less a falling man; the house of Osborne is none the less a falling house; no sister of his shall become my niece; no nephew of mine shall patch up with the old and honoured name of De Launay the failing credit of a speculative foreigner."

And Mr. Osborne, too, had his thoughts; they re-entered the drawing-room; Madame de Launay resumed an interrupted conversation with Mrs. Osborne, Monsieur le Baron, Auguste de Launay, took up his courtship where he had left it off, and William Osborne sighed to think such a poor miserable comedy could be one of the aspects of life.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

ISABELLA.

FLUSHED and breathless Adèle ran up the staircase. Half way up she met Marie, Lilian's bonne.

"Mademoiselle Lilian has fallen asleep at length," she said, complacently; I thought she would never have done telling me how beautiful her mamma was."

Even Marie must say something sweet, thought Adèle; and instead of going at once to the room of Anna, she diverged, and entered that of Lilian.

Lilian had not been present at the dinner, but she had for an hour and more been indulged with staying in the drawing-room. Longer she might have remained if her papa, suddenly seeing her, had not at once dismissed her to sleep and rest. Adèle had not perceived her going; and she now felt the want of bidding her little stepdaughter good night!—of kissing her in her sleep—of looking at her before she left with Mr. Osborne in the morning.

Lilian was not asleep; she lay with her black eyes wide open, but somewhat dreamy. She gazed vaguely at her father's wife. Adèle bent over her and kissed her fondly.

"Good night, Lillian!" she said; "I am very happy; you cannot know how happy I am, Lillian, and it is no use telling you; and yet I must tell it, for indeed I am happy—too happy to-night."

Lillian looked at her, and laughed, then turned her head away, and fell fast asleep. The night lamp was burning safely. Adèle left, descended the staircase lightly, and entered her sister-in-law's room.

"Oh, you are come, are you?" crossly said Anna; "pray do not—you have your friends below."

But Adèle would not let her go on. She threw her arms around Anna's neck; she kissed Anna's cheek, and in the triumph of her heart, she cried—

"Every one likes, every one admires me to-night, and so must you."

Anna softened, and looked at her.

"You look very pretty," she said, "quite beautiful. What does William say?"

"Nothing," quietly replied Adèle.

"Then he ought to be ashamed of himself," said Anna; "why should he not admire you as well as every one else?"

The eyes of Adèle sparkled; she laughed a little mischievously; but she did not justify Mr. Osborne.

"What can I do for you?" she asked, looking round the room.

Anna's ill temper returned at once. In a querulous tone she asked if Adèle was going to leave her? Soothingly Adèle replied that she was not going yet, but long she could not stay, as Anna knew.

"On account of those tiresome people below," moaned Anna. "How very odd to give a dinner because Isabella is going to marry. And how ridiculous of her to think of marrying that stupid, big, foolish Baron, with his goggle eyes!"

In vain Adèle attempted to soothe Anna's offended feelings. When Anna got into the murmuring mood, it was an enchanted forest where she roamed up and down for ever like one unable to find any issue; and she was still lamenting the folly and stupidity of her whole family, and pityingly recording her own grievous wrongs, when the door of her room opened, and Isabella entered.

With a look her brother had told her below that all was right. Deep gratification had been her first feeling; her cheek had flushed, her eyes had sparkled with joy. But on this feeling had fol-

lowed the sting of a secret and bitter mortification. She knew and guessed to whom and to what she owed her lover's fidelity, and every one would know and guess it too. Suspiciously and jealously Isabella looked at the whole Mazois family; she hated the congratulatory nod of her brother Joseph; she longed to reply, rudely or insolently, to her mother's tender whisper.

"Oh, my love, how I have suffered! But William is an angel."

Even William only escaped by not coming near her, or taking any notice of her. Ill fared, however, the unlucky Baron when he ventured on even so simple and innocent a remark as that the room was close.

"I find it chill," said Isabella, with a haughty shiver; and feeling that she could not, with any show of civility or patience, look at the man whose love cooled or warmed according to her declining or rising fortunes, she said that she must go for a few minutes to her sister Anna, and left the saloon without deigning him a second look.

She entered Anna's apartment sullen and gloomy, longing to vent on some one the bitterness of her heart; and unluckily she found Adèle there. Anna's address did not mollify her offended pride or soothe her irritated temper.

"I wonder you could find a second to spare from that lover of yours to come up here," querulously said Anna.

Isabella sat down by the fire, without answering.

"You know I cannot bear any one to sit in that way between the fire and me," said Anna, indignant, "and you do it on purpose."

Isabella did not condescend to answer. In vain Adèle tried to avert the storm, by wheeling Anna's chair so that none of the heat the fire gave forth should be lost to her. Anna crossly asked her to leave her chair alone, and Isabella sneered loftily. At once Anna veered round.

"You need not sneer at Adèle so," she said; "she is better than you are, and kinder to me—she leaves every one to come to me—and you and ma hate to put your foot in my room."

"We are so kindly received when we do come," said Isabella, yawning. "I hope that as you prefer Adèle to your own relatives, so you receive her more kindly."

"I wish they would not quarrel about me," thought Adèle, alarmed. "What have I got to do with it?"

But so, to her sorrow, it was to be.

"Adèle is not selfish," persisted Anna, "and that is why every one likes her. You are shamefully selfish."

"And no one likes me—thanks."

"Well, no one does like you—that stupid Baron does not like you. What does he marry you for?"

Isabella turned so deadly pale, that Adèle was frightened; but Isabella rallied, and merely said:

"What does he marry me for, Anna? Pray tell me—I should like to know—it concerns me, you know."

"He marries you for money," crossly said Anna.

Isabella looked at Adèle with flashing eyes: "William has already told her," she thought, "and she, kind creature, has run up and told her dear Anna. Ay, such good news travel fast." And she laughed aloud, with such bitter, dreary mirth, with a merriment that foreboded so plainly fury and wrath, that Anna, vexed to have brought this storm on herself, hesitatingly added:

"Well, you need not laugh so—you know very well you told me yourself he did not care about you and that you did not care about him—after all, how should I have known—if you had not told me—that he was not marrying you for love."

But vainly did Anna thus hope to allay Isabella's wrath. It is one thing to confess boldly and daringly a humiliating truth, and another thing to be taunted with it in a presence that makes the taunt doubly galling; besides, if Anna had been on her death-bed, and solemnly vowed that Adèle had told her nothing, Isabella would not in her present mood have believed her dying sister. With such passion, with such bitter resentment, did she look at her sister-in-law, that Adèle, though unconscious of offence, rose alarmed, and stepped back. Isabella, too, rose and confronted her.

"I am very much obliged to you, Madame," she said, in a voice tremulous with anger, "for your kindness. Oh! I shall deny nothing; the truth is the truth: I confess it openly. Yes, I could not be Monsieur de Launay's wife, but for my brother's generosity; but remember, too, that if it were not for that same foolish generosity you would not now have the power of triumphing over me. Remember, I say, why William married you."

Adèle turned red and pale. "I do not know what you mean," she said, at length; "I do not know what I have done, that you speak so angrily and look so vindictive. Never, willingly, have I offended you, and once for all," she added, and her cheek flushed, and she drew up her slight figure as she spoke, "once for all I beg, that if you can respect me in no other way, you will respect me as your brother's wife."

"As the mistress of the house!" scornfully said Isabella.

"As the wife of the master of the house," replied Adèle, with proud humility, "all that I have, all that I am, I owe to him—his affection," she added, her eyes softening, "is the only wealth I can claim of my own."

"Ay, but why did he marry you?" asked Isabella, bitterly; "why did he marry you?"

Adèle gave her a look of quiet, calm surprise.

"Because he liked me," she said.

"Not he—not he," cried Isabella, laughing; "Mamma wanted to know if he did, and I overheard him with my own ears indignantly denying that he had ever thought about you."

"Perhaps he had not, then," said Adèle, not a whit disturbed; "besides, I remember now, it was Mrs. Osborne who first told me Mr. Osborne had taken a fancy to me."

Isabella looked infinitely amused.

"Ay, just as she told him that you were fond of him—oh! you need not redden up so—I do not say that you were, nor do I say that he believed it: No—no—it was a marriage de convenance on both sides—you married him for his money—he married you because he could not help it."

Adèle looked more bewildered than angry.

"He could not help it?" she said; "why, how could he not help it?—my godmother did not wish me to marry him. Why could he not help marrying me?"

"Oh! dear, how my head aches with all this talking," moaned Anna; "I wish you would be quiet, both of you, or go elsewhere."

Isabella remained moody and silent; her good angel was whispering in her ear: "Do not—do not—if not for kindness—do not for prudence," and she was listening to him, not convinced, but silent at least.

"Why could he not help marrying me?" persisted Adèle; "what could put such an odd idea into your head, unless you mean that he was so fond of me that he could not help marrying me, poor, ignorant, unworthy of him as I was, and if you mean that, Isabella, I can forgive you all the rest."

The gay, mischievous triumph of her smile exasperated Isabella. "Be revenged once for all," whispered the devil in her heart; "what, shall you be publicly bartered like a bale of goods? shall your brother be compelled to buy back your husband? shall she insolently triumph over you, and add to that triumph the false boast of having been married for love? shall she have that sweet, that heavenly thought? A handsome, good, accomplished gentleman chose me amongst all women for his wife; he married me

not for money, not for position, but like the men in books, for love, and nothing but love. No, that she shall not; she either knows the truth, and she is a barefaced hypocrite, or she does not know it and she is a foolish dupe, who must once for all be humbled down, and learn how much William cared for that baby face." She looked at Adèle, and in a cold, hard, dry voice, she said,—

"You know very well why William could not help marrying you. He had had the misfortune of making your godmother lose your fortune, which was large, though you choose to call yourself poor—he offered the only reparation in his power, marriage, which was accepted. He acted as a man of honour, and you as a prudent girl. Do not imagine I blame either of you, but I must say I consider all this pretence of love very ridiculous."

She calmly resumed her seat and took up a book from the corner of the mantelshef, but her hand shook violently, and she could not look at Adèle.

But Adèle looked at her and smiled, and from her she turned to Anna, still smiling, and with a look that said, "Did you ever hear anything like it? why, she is mad—raving mad"—but Anna did not smile, she looked dismayed; she clasped her hands, she cried, "Good gracious, Isabella, he will kill you—you know he did not want her to know it—you know he did not—oh, dear! oh, dear!" moaned Anna, "what a life we shall have of it! Oh, do not tell him she has told you, Adèle," she said, turning to her, "he will turn us all out of the house, and at this time of the year. I know it will kill me—do not tell him, dear, for Heaven's sake!"

Adèle did not reply; her arms dropped by her side, she sank on her chair pale, cold, lifeless, half dead. Isabella rose and left the room.

Loud were Anna's lamentations. What would William say? He had warned them all from the first never to interfere between him and his wife—what would he say? Oh, all was lost—they were all undone if Adèle told him."

"He shall know nothing from me," said Adèle, and rising, she asked if Anna wanted anything. But for once Anna had no wants; there was something in her sister-in-law's cold face that repelled speech. "She is very quiet about it," thought Anna, as Adèle left the room, "she must have known all about it all along." And Anna did not know that there are some who can keep grief locked in their heart as the Spartan boy kept in his bosom the fierce wild thing that was gnawing it, without a murmur, without a moan.

Apathetic and cold Adèle descended that staircase along which she had run up a little before, escaping half joyous, half ashamed, from her husband's fond embrace.

As she stood on the last step the drawing-room door opened, and Mrs. Osborne appeared.

"My dearest love," said that gracious lady, "where have you been all this time?"

"I was with Anna," answered Adèle, in a lifeless tone.

"Anna is very naughty to have kept you so long; you are coming in, of course."

"Not yet, if you please, my head aches."

"I believe it; I always had the headache when I gave a dinner. Well, dear, sit in here awhile," she added, opening the door of the billiard-room, "the quiet, the cool, will do you good."

Adèle entered; but even from the threshold she looked at her mother-in-law.

"Excuse me if I say," she observed, "that I should like to be alone."

"My dear, that is a matter of course," said the complaisant lady.

Adèle closed the door, and bolted it within.

"I knew Isabella would break out in some dreadful way or other!" thought Mrs. Osborne, greatly alarmed at her daughter-in-law's looks; "what can it be? Oh, Anna knows, of course."

And up she ran to Anna's room. What she learned there we need not tell.

Adèle went up to the fire. "I am cold," she thought, and she shivered. She knelt down on the hearth to warm herself; then she forgot it; she clasped her hands, she bowed her head, she laid and rested it on the chair her husband had occupied, and closing her eyes, she let thought sweep over her like a flood of bitter waters.

One feeling was strong above the rest—humiliation. Adèle felt humbled to the very dust; she had given the first innocence of girlhood, the first bloom of beauty, the first freshness of a being fresh and young, to a man who married her—good heavens!—to a man who married her from honour! She had brought those gifts so precious that Religion and Society have decreed that only the love and liberty of a man's lifetime can purchase them from woman; she had brought them to a man who took them with reluctance and regret, like offerings beautiful indeed, but rather too dearly bought. Odious, hateful, detestable was the memory of the first weeks of their marriage, of that fondness which duty had

dictated, or which, thought more bitter, more humiliating still, her beauty had awakened for a moment in the cold heart of a cold man. In his heart! Ah, she had never been there! He could have lived in the same house with her for ever, and never have wished to bind her to his being, and blend her life with his. Her youth and her beauty had pleased him as they could please any other man; they had charmed him as he could have been charmed by the same youth, by the same beauty, in any other woman. Any other woman! Ah, how many other women must he have seen and known in his wandering life, whom, had he been free, he would have preferred to her. How often when she thought him most fond, when she—vain, foolish girl—almost wished in her impatient heart that he liked her less, that he would not tease her with all that love—how often must he have been thinking with useless regret—"Oh, why, since I was to marry, why did not Providence bless me with this one or with that one, instead of this pretty, foolish child, that is only fit to be the plaything or the toy of an idle hour?"

But the thought was too bitter; it called up images so tormenting, remembrances so exasperating, that like one mad Adèle rose and walked about the room wringing her hands, and moaning from very anguish. Blame her not; think her not unreasonable or mad indeed; remember that there is one feeling born and bred beyond all other feelings in a woman's heart—the pride of her being, the sense of her worth as a woman, and think that when that feeling has been outraged, even without shame in the eyes of the world, even without sin in the eyes of God, the woman who does not keenly feel that she has been cruelly wronged has not the nature of her sex.

"He never loved me," thought Adèle, with a swelling heart—"never—never! And this evening,—oh, this evening!" she added, her bent brow burning with a shame none could see—"this evening—do I not know that I dressed for him—looked handsome for him—that I did all I could to make him feel in his very heart that his wife was young and beautiful? He may not know it—what need I care?—I do. Did I not—like a daring girl that would bring back a lover that has grown strange, but who still fondly loves her in his heart—did I not go to him where he stood alone, and as far as I could—as far as I dared—seek to charm and allure my husband? And I succeeded—Heaven help me!—I succeeded. Oh, if I could have imagined that he did not love me with every fibre of his being, how I would have died before I would have given him a look or a smile that would have made

him think—'Really my wife is pretty;' how I would die now before I would go to him thus, and seek to recall his fugitive fondness for the girl whom he married—fancied a little while, but never loved; whom he took not even for her pretty face, but oh, miserable humiliation, because he could not help it! And I—and I—"

She remembered his coldness, which she had resolved to conquer; she remembered the recess; she remembered that room—her boasting—her triumph—her fondness; she buried her face in her hands, and burning tears scalded her fingers.

Her thoughts went no farther; they could not, they had reached the fulness of bitterness; there remained behind but a dull, silent pain, that told her she had suffered. Her tears dried; she removed her hands from her face; she looked at herself in the glass—there was a glittering light in her eyes—a bright spot burned on her cheek. "I can go in now," thought Adèle; "neither he nor any one else will guess or know anything." And as if nothing had happened she entered the drawing-room. Only one thing she did—she paused for a moment to see where her husband was, so as not to look there, so as not to meet his eye, or have to bear the misery of his triumphant smile.

Mrs. Osborne had returned from her daughter's room; she looked agitated and pale, and gave Adèle a troubled, beseeching glance. Isabella was there too by the Baron; on hearing the door open she neither moved nor looked; she knew, as if she had seen her, who had entered. Adèle, with a composure and an ease that surprised herself, moved amongst her guests once more the polite mistress of the house. She smiled on Capitaine Joseph, she looked over Monsieur Mazois's shoulder to see what cards he held; he was deep in *ecarté* with Madame de Launay. She answered with a pretty shake of the head that lady's mimic inquiry of whether she had felt unwell, and finally she sat down by the three *Mesdemoiselles Mazois*, whilst Capitaine Joseph, like a good general, amused their mother.

"Is monsieur Osborne really going to Paris to-morrow?" asked the eldest of these three young ladies.

"He really is," replied the voice of Mr. Osborne.

Adèle looked up and saw him by her side.

"And what is more," he continued, "Madame Osborne is to accompany him."

"In this weather!" exclaimed the three daughters of Monsieur Mazois.

"My wife is a hardy little mountaineer," he replied, and his hand took hers that hung listlessly in the folds of her dress, and pressed it kindly.

The heart of Adèle beat; she felt very much inclined to cry. She could no longer wish for her husband's fondness, it would spring from a source she was too proud not to hate; all she wanted was his affection and his esteem. Oh! that she could as easily win these as she had won that liking of the eye which seeking beauty is rarely denied. Red and grave, she looked up in his face, and if eyes could have spoken, plainly would hers have said to him then, "Like me, I am your wife; like me as much as you can, too, but let not your affection humble me in your eyes or in my own. I like your grave coldness ten times better than your tenderness; that, at least, is not humiliating, this is."

But it was only a glance—rapid, transitory—which his caught and did not arrest, which told him nothing. She did not withdraw her hand from his; she smiled at his observation, and turning back to her guests, confirmed it.

"I fear no cold."

Here Capitaine Joseph, unable to remain so long away from his triple love, stepped over to them.

"I appeal to you," he said, pathetically, "is not a soldier's lot a sad, solitary lot? I must depart alone to-morrow; Osborne has a companion who shares his journey, who doubles his happiness, who lessens his cares, who charms and enchants."

Here Capitaine Joseph's speech—to which the three young ladies were listening with a slow motion of the fans indicative of pleased attention—was brought to an abrupt close. Madame Mazois had arisen, exclaiming agitatedly—

"Not another second, Arthur, not another moment. Thirteen at table! thirteen in this room! I tell you I will have the carriage at once, and never enter this house again," she added, "never, never."

Every one had arisen save Madame de Launay, who had remained sitting with her cards in her hand, and who looked provoked, and every one, save that lady, now surrounded Madame Mazois. A vain attempt was made to prove that not thirteen but twelve or fourteen guests were present. But Madame Mazois gathered them in a heap like a flock of sheep, and reckoned them up on her fingers, and found that, thanks to the unexpected arrival of Capitaine Joseph, there were thirteen persons in the room, and that she had actually sat down to and eaten a dinner with twelve other individuals.

"We shall have a death this year," she said tragically. "I told Docteur Guillaume about my palpitations, and he only laughed. He will not laugh before the year is over. Arthur, the carriage."

Arthur looked helplessly foolish; his father coughed, and, turning to Madame de Launay, supposed there was no help for it. But Madame de Launay stoutly held her cards, and kept her seat.

"Ah! bah!" she said, addressing Madame Mazois, "it is I who will die before the year is out. Monsieur Mazois, I mark the king."

Vain attempt; Madame Mazois, wild with alarm, did not even hear her; she was leaving the room precipitately, and the only adieu she gave her hosts was—

"Thank you—I do not mind the cold—I shall never enter this house again—never."

"Of course, if you give up the game, you lose it," said Madame de Launay, sweeping up the stakes from the green card-table, and dropping them in her pocket.

Monsieur Mazois muttered something between his teeth; gave a sheepish, hurried bow, and followed his wife out of the room. Mr. Osborne courteously apologized to the eldest of the three daughters for the annoyance Madame Mazois had experienced, and Adèle chimed in with a few words as courteous as his, and more agreeable by far. Mademoiselle Mazois declared they were both too good, and all but said that her mamma was absurdly foolish. With adieux as affectionate and prolix as Madame Mazois's had been brief, she and her sisters, and Arthur, took their leave.

"A very stupid woman," said Madame de Launay, rising from the card-table. "I warn you, my dear," she added, addressing Adèle, "that I am not going. I mean to sleep here."

"Your room has been ready these three days," replied Adèle; "but you are not going to retire yet surely," she added, trying to smile.

"No, my dear;" she gently patted her cheek; "no, certainly not; but, I think, that as we leave early to-morrow, Mr. Osborne, Auguste, and I, will just discuss a few matters to-night."

The two gentlemen gave prompt assent. They left the room with Madame de Launay. At once Isabella rose and walked out; her mother followed her immediately.

"I had just made up my mind," muttered Capitaine Joseph,

surveying himself in the glass, "provoking woman. She will have a tooth againt me now, because I was thirteenth—I declare it is midnight. I must bid you adieu, my dear little sister-in-law. Confess," he added, as he took her hand, "confess that a soldier's lot is a solitary lot. Happy William, to travel with a wife who adores him! If he were only here, I would, with your permission, claim a brother's parting embrace, but since he is not, I must bid you adieu and good-night in a breath."

"Good-night. Adieu," said Adèle, listlessly.

Capitaine Joseph raised her hand to his lips, and thought it felt rather lifeless; he thought, too, that Adèle heard him with rather a lustreless look; but he attributed this to fatigue, kindly recommended a cup of hot broth before she went to bed, and left her.

Adèle remained alone in the deserted saloon. Tired, sick at heart, she sank down on a chair, and tried to collect her wandering thoughts. All she could remember was, that she had asked to go with her husband to-morrow. "And I must! I must," she thought, with a suppressed groan.

Her head was buried in her hands. She did not hear the door opening, until the bland voice of Mrs. Osborne addressed her with: "My dear, how do you feel now?"

Adèle looked up; her mother-in-law stood before her; by the fireplace, with her feet on the fender, and her elbows on her knees, sat Isabella, sullen and moody.

"I am better, thank you," quietly replied Adèle.

Mrs. Osborne raised her handkerchief to her eyes.

"My dearest," she said, from behind that useful portion of her toilet: "my dearest, I know all. Anna told me—Isabella has confessed with regret," Isabella looked up haughtily at her mother, "with the regret of a generous heart," resumed Mrs. Osborne, "that she has informed you of certain facts with which you were not, it seems, acquainted before. But, my dear child, better you should know it than not," said Mrs. Osborne, sitting down by her daughter-in-law and taking her passive hand, "it explains so much that you could not understand—it makes natural so much that must have been inexplicable to you—I cannot help, dear, thinking that it is really an advantage to you to know what you do know. Isabella, my dear, Anna would like you to be with her a while.

Isabella smiled sternly.

"I shall not leave this room till you have done speaking," she said.

She had consented to let her mother soften, so far as it could be softened, the blow she had inflicted ; but only on one condition—that she would be witness, that no concession should be made in her name she should not be present to contradict by speech, or ratify by her silence.

"I really do think it is an advantage to you," resumed Mrs. Osborne, whose task was anything but easy ; "for, you see, whilst you thought William had married you for love, you were unreasonable—expecting—and now that you know—"

Adèle withdrew her hand, and rose pale and trembling.

"Monsieur Osborne did not marry me for love," she said ; "I was not, I know, worthy to inspire him with that feeling ; but if he had not liked me," she added, looking at Mrs. Osborne with calm pride, "he would never have married me."

"My dearest, I did not mean—"

With a gesture Adèle silenced her.

"If he had not esteemed me," she said, her eyes lighting, "he would have become a beggar rather than have allowed me to bear his name. Some men," she added, pressing her hands to her bosom, "will sell themselves to any woman for her money ; but he is the last that would do that ; and that he married me is and ever will be to me a sufficient proof of his liking for me."

"Ay, my love."

But this time it was Isabella who rose and interrupted her mother's intended speech. Repentance fled, wrath returned.

"I understand your allusion to men who will sell themselves," she began, pale with passion.

"You understand nothing," said Adèle, for the first time treating Isabella with cool disdain. "I never so much as thought of you or your marriage. I need insult none to defend myself. A good man liked me well enough to marry me ; I stand secure there, and I defy you both to take that from me—it is beyond your power," she added, with a smile, sad in its triumph. "I have not—I never had his love—I have his affection and his esteem. May Heaven grant you as much."

"Isabella, my love, my dearest, say nothing—for God's sake let all this cease," cried Mrs. Osborne, wishing too late she had not been so anxious to mend what could not be mended ; but Isabella was loose : call back the hawk from his prey, call not back injured pride, offended self-love from their victim.

"His affection !" she said, "his esteem ! ay, the affection which, as a man, he could feel for any pretty face ; an esteem which has shown itself in never telling you anything. You are

very kind in wishing me similar good fortune. Truly, I hope to be more to my husband than a pretty woman."

The sting went home; Adèle looked from the daughter to the mother, then at her own image in the glass, and subdued, broken in spirit and in heart, she smiled with a sort of calm despair.

"Have your way," she said; "be it so—I grant it, I have never been but my husband's mistress, he liked me, as you say, for my pretty face—his esteem, his confidence I never had, never deserved, never won. I grant all this—what more have you to say? what other taunt have you to add to all the bitter taunts of the last six weeks? Speak—now is your time."

Again she looked at them both—they remained silent.

Adèle smiled a dreary smile.

"Even malice is exhausted," she said, looking at Isabella; "even false pity, more insulting than malice, must needs be silent," she continued, glancing at Mrs. Osborne; "and now hear me, for I, too, have something to say. Once for all and for ever, I forbid either of you to dare to mention to me my husband's name. Once for all and for ever, I forbid either of you to dare to inquire into the secrets of our married life. If I have no virtues of my own that you can respect me for, I tell you that, as his wife, you shall respect me."

She shook from head to foot; she was pale as death; she spoke in a voice so low, that it scarcely rose on the stillness of the room, so clear, that not a word could be lost. They heard her, mute and amazed. Adèle had always been light, gay, playful as a child in her very resistance. She had warded the blow with a jest, and smiled whilst they struck. And now she stood before them no more a careless girl, but an indignant woman, giving back defiance for insult, and for scorn a scorn more deep.

"My dear Mrs. William," began Mrs. Osborne, unconsciously adopting a form of respect she had never given Adèle before, but she did not continue; a change passed over her face, a change which imparted itself to the haughty features of Isabella. Adèle turned round; on the threshold of the recess she saw her husband standing with the half-lifted drapery in his right hand. On that sombre background his face looked not pale, but white, and it was white not with mere anger, but with a wrath so deep, though so silent, that Mrs. Osborne looked uneasy, and even the haughty Isabella quailed. He looked at them both, and did not utter one word, until stepping down and crossing the room, he came to where Adèle still stood. He then laid his hand on her shoulder, and looking at them, he said in cold, measured tones,—

"Isabella, my word is passed, and it shall not be retracted; Madam," he was addressing his stepmother, "I regret that you should compel me to say that this house can be your home and the home of your family no more."

Isabella gave him a look of defiance, and walked out of the room; Mrs. Osborne drew herself up, and said with dignified reproach,—

"This house was mine when your father lived," and she, too, walked out.

As the door closed upon her, Adèle looked up in her husband's face.

"I know you like me," she said, simply; and stooping, she pressed her lips on the hand that still rested on her shoulder.

He sat down and made her sit down by him. Of her own accord she passed her two arms around his neck, and laid her cheek to his. Before he could speak, she said,—

"Justify yourself in nothing—do me not that wrong; I thank God for this: that there is one image that will ever remain stainless in my heart—yours. You did not, you could not be in love with a little girl like me, but you could like and esteem me enough to marry me. I ask for no more—I am happy to be your wife thus. We are not in love either of us," she added, sadly smiling, "but we love one another, do we not?"

"I hope we do," he said.

He looked at her fixedly. Calmly she had spoken, and calm she looked. He would have preferred passionate reproaches and floods of tears—all that a wronged woman can give vent to in a moment like this, for he would have known well enough how to charm her wrath away. But there was no need—ah, none, indeed! His wife was fond enough of him to be hurt, but she respected him too much to be angry. Ah! truly he had been dreaming that evening; she loved, but she was not in love; her pride had been wounded, but the wound had not reached her heart. No wronged love bade her upbraid her wronger and fly from his arms with passionate resentment; she could lie there calm, passive, apathetic; suffering, indeed, but resigned.

The voice of Adèle awoke him from his reverie.

"Grant me one request," she said; "let me see, let them see, that you like me, your poor little wife. Let them stay in this house, and this shall be my revenge."

"You would repent it," he said, gravely.

"They are powerless against me. Let them stay."

He hesitated—she insisted.

"They were left to you in trust," she said, softly; "remember that."

"Remember it! Ay, night and morning, and every hour of the day. Woeful was the hour when I accepted that dreary task."

"She is your sister—she is your father's widow," still pleaded Adèle.

"They are my enemies," he said, with a contracted brow, "and to live under one roof with my enemies is more than I can do."

"Because they are your enemies you must, you must."

"I cannot." And he looked inexorable.

"For my sake—do—do."

She twined her arms around his neck. She pleaded with a sort of passionate entreaty in her looks and her tones that moved his very heart. She did not love him, but could he help loving her?

"They have humbled you, my darling," he said, "and you shall be revenged. At your prayer they shall stay. They have dared to taunt you with my indifference; they shall learn now, that through you alone is a favour to be had, is a boon to be granted by me."

He spoke with a mingled tenderness and resentment that frightened his wife. His brow was knit, his eyes burned with unusual light; there was anger blending in the sweetness of his smile. "Ah!" she thought, with some passion, "if duty, honour, pity for my weakness, generous liking, can rouse him so,—what would it be if he loved a woman with his whole heart? As he does not love me—as he cannot—as he will not—never—never." If she had but spoken those reproaches it would have been well for them both; but she did not. Pride silenced her swelling heart, and sealed her trembling lips. With a sort of despair she submitted to that tenderness which was not love, to that affection which was to become a new and more bitter torment than the first. It had been hard to receive it, when she did not love; but now, with the consciousness that she owed it to honour, to duty, it was intolerable.

"Thank you! you are too good. God bless you," she said to her husband, and breaking from him with feverish passion, she exclaimed: "I must go—let me go."

But even as she spoke, a change came across her face; he thought she was fainting; she was not, but she felt sick and giddy. He did not ask what ailed her, but at once carried her up to her room, where Jeannette sat waiting.

Adèle had not lost her consciousness, but she was cold as death, and seemed unable to speak. Jeannette clapped her hands with a sort of despair:

"I knew they would kill her," she said; "I knew they would."

Mr. Osborne took no notice of the words, though he heard them but too well; but when Adèle was so far recovered as to be able to say, though so low, that he could scarcely hear her—

"I feel better;" he turned to Jeannette, and saying:

"Do not leave her until I come back"—a command which Jeannette thought insulting and superfluous—he left the room of his wife.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

REVELATIONS.

MR. OSBORNE went down to the Hall; he there found Madame de Launay and her nephew, sitting as he had left them, looking over some papers scattered on the table before them.

"I am sorry to have kept you so long waiting," said Mr. Osborne; "but some servant locked the door that admits from my study to the house. I had to go out through the garden, to get in again through the conservatory to the drawing-room—and it took time."

"I thought—I feared Madame Osborne was unwell," said the Baron, hesitatingly.

"She is faint and tired," briefly answered Mr. Osborne; and drawing a chair to the table, he added that he was quite ready to hear Madame de Launay.

"All I have to say, is this," said Madame de Launay, taking a pinch of snuff, "the partnership must be on a new basis, Monsieur Osborne, on a new basis."

He bowed assent.

"In short, you are a man of business, you understand that law of all business—interest."

"I believe it is the law of society," said Mr. Osborne, smiling.

"Precisely. We want extension; you want support; but it cannot be unconditional, Monsieur Osborne. You must pay for it

—you must pay for it," added Madame de Launay, tapping her snuff-box, and looking shrewd.

Mr. Osborne pushed towards her the papers, for which he had gone to his study; Madame de Launay put on her spectacles and looked over them attentively. When she laid them down, she said, shortly:

"Well you are better off than I thought,—but how does that alter the question?"

"Why, that I want support less, and you extension just as much."

"And you will pay less, eh?" she said, giving him a quick look.

"Madame de Launay," gravely replied Mr. Osborne, "this question of the partnership has been throughout of your seeking, not of mine. You are free to stay, you are free to withdraw—at your pleasure. I shall go to Paris, not to-morrow, as I thought, but after to-morrow; I shall and must stay there some time. My affairs are not very likely to get better or worse in the meantime; you will have leisure to think; I shall expect a positive answer by my return."

"And my marriage?" put in the Baron.

"What about it?" asked his aunt.

"Do you mean to say," he exclaimed, rising and walking up and down the room, "do you mean to say that I am to wait that eternity?" he stopped short, and stood before his aunt and Mr. Osborne, an amazed and indignant lover.

Madame de Launay shook her head and shrugged her shoulders with the pity of experience and age, for the ardour and folly of youth, and Mr. Osborne smiled at them both with a calm disdain he cared not to hide.

"Of course, you must wait," said Madame de Launay, rising; "but Monsieur Osborne will be considerate; he will not remain too long absent."

"You may rely upon that," said Mr. Osborne, kindly, and he rose too.

The Baron muttered something between his set teeth, that sounded very like an imprecation on the worldliness of the world, but he ended by calming down, took the arm of his aunt, and bowing coldly to Mr. Osborne, in a manner that implied he was the secret foe of his, the Baron's happiness, he supported Madame de Launay out of the room. The door closed upon them.

"I knew they would kill her!" thought Mr. Osborne, echoing Jeannette's word. "Good God! how long has this been

going on?" A tormenting desire to know all, possessed him; he could not resist it. At once he went to his sister Anna's room. He was so absorbed and intent on his purpose, that he entered without knocking, and Anna was so absorbed in rocking herself before the fire and moaning, that she neither saw him enter the room, nor heard him bolt the door after him. Indeed, she was not conscious of his presence until he stood before her on the hearth, when she indignantly exclaimed:

"I will not leave the house in this cruel weather—I had nothing to do with their wickedness, and I will not go and be killed with the cold."

"No one need leave this house who chooses to stay in it," quietly said Mr. Osborne; "I have yielded against my judgment to the wish of Adèle."

"But what had I to do with it all?" querulously asked Anna; "did I ever do anything to Adèle? Did I not always tell them to let her alone? that it was a shame to treat her as they did? What then had I to do with it all?"

"Nothing, indeed," gravely replied Mr. Osborne, "and I am come to you, as to the friend of my wife, to learn what her kind heart will never let me know: all that has been going on without my knowledge for the last six or seven weeks."

"No—no, I will tell you nothing," cried Anna; "it is very selfish of you to want to bring Ma and Isabella on my back—I want to be quiet—and I will be quiet."

But Mr. Osborne was determined to know all, and accordingly he sat down like one quietly resolved.

"Go away," said Anna, crossly. "I want to be alone—I tell you you shall know nothing from me. I will not make myself uncomfortable for any one."

"What I had to say to them is said," quietly observed Mr. Osborne; "they have no more to hear from me. And whether I know much or little, makes no difference to them."

"But I have nothing to tell you," said Anna, impatiently, "nothing that you do not know."

"I know nothing save a few words that I heard to-night."

"Well then, that is all—go away."

But Mr. Osborne did not move.

"Oh, dear! oh, dear!" moaned Anna, "he will stay here the whole night, and I shall have them on my back to-morrow."

"Let them, if they dare, question my right to know what goes on in my house!" indignantly exclaimed Mr. Osborne. "Of them, of their concerns, I ask to know nothing; but they

have violated my privacy, and they shall learn to their cost that I will know to the very last tittle of that past they hid so well, and which you, Anna, I cannot but say, helped them to hide."

"I—I!" cried Anna, "and might you not have known it if you had only used your eyes and your ears? They began at her from the very first day, and they went on; she let them, and you did not stop them. How was I to know you would be in such a rage all at once?"

"You are right there, Anna," said Mr. Osborne; "I should have stopped them; you are in the right."

"Of course I am!" crossly said Anna, "and what have I to do with it all? I liked her at once, when she gave me that fur thing, and they sneered at her, and told her you did not care about her, that you had not written whilst you were away, that you would get sick of her; but she only laughed, and you only patted Isabella's cheek."

Mr. Osborne gnawed his nether lip, but he only said—

"True; I was to blame there."

"Of course you were; and then why did you tell her nothing? Why did they know all about the business, and she not a word? Isabella laughed at her for being such a simpleton, and then Ma pitied her, and told her not to mind; that you were fond of her all the same, but that she was young, and did not understand these things. Do you think it was very pleasant for her to be laughed at and pitied from morning till night?"

"Pleasant!" said Mr. Osborne, with a bitter smile.

"Well, then, why did you not stop them?" shortly asked Anna.

He silently bore with the reproach.

"If they did not go on opposite you," resumed his sister, querulously, "you yet might have seen by her looks that she was wretched; a cat could see that her heart was breaking. No, you saw nothing; you did all you could to justify their talk by your ways. You used her cruelly."

"I!" cried Mr. Osborne, unable, even for the sake of knowing all, to bear with the unmerited reproach, "good heavens! what did I do?"

"You let them see that you did not like her—that you did not care about her. Oh, you were very kind, of course! but any one could see that you had never been fond of her!"

"Did she say that?" asked Mr. Osborne, much moved.

"Oh, no, she never said anything of you save that you were very kind, and that she was very happy; but one was just as true

as the other. Happy! ay, she was as happy as the birds Robert catches and ties to the foot of the table for the cat to play with. I would not, for anything in this world, lead the life she has led the last two months."

Mr. Osborne's lips trembled.

"Anna, you exaggerate. They have been unkind, and I have been remiss, but it has not been so dreadful."

"You are very selfish, and very cruel," indignantly said Anna; "why, she has not had a day's peace—an hour's rest. I tell you they were always at her; I mean Isabella; and though she only shook her head and laughed, do you think she did not feel it? Ah, but sometimes when Isabella stung her too much, when Ma's pity went too far, she did not laugh, she looked at them both like a poor hunted little thing, and leaned her forehead on her hand, and could not speak. I tell you that when I think of all you have let her suffer, I am amazed at you."

"She never breathed a word to me," he said.

"Of course she did not! I told her over and over—'Tell William,' but she answered—'I can see that he has plenty of cares on his mind, why should I add to them? Besides, it is too awkward and too difficult for a man to interfere between women.' And so she let them go on; and they did go on," added Anna; "I declare it has made my life miserable. She never came up here but Isabella was after her to say something spiteful. It was only three days ago that she was at her worse than ever."

"But why," Mr. Osborne could not help interrupting, "why should Isabella take this pleasure in tormenting my wife? Adèle has never done anything to her; why on earth hate her so?"

"Because she is your wife—because she is more beautiful than Isabella, who has a long nose and a large mouth; because every one likes Adèle, and no one likes Isabella; and last of all, because Isabella has a bad temper. She cannot be quiet herself, and will let no one be at peace."

"And what was it that happened three days ago?" resumed Mr. Osborne, after a brief pause.

"I cannot talk any more; my head aches," shortly said Anna.

"It was not about me," he persisted.

"You know very well it was!" crossly said Anna; "what else did ever Isabella tease her save about you? She tried to laugh at her because she has not read much or seen much; but she saw it did not hurt her, so she left it off. She was at her a whole day about the Andes; but she did not mind at all Isabella's

talk; she said she did not care about the Andes, and they might be where they liked; what were the Andes to her?"

"Poor child!" said Mr. Osborne, half-smiling.

"Oh, yes, it is all very well to call her poor child," sharply said Anna, "but they should not, or, rather, Isabella should not, be allowed to laugh at your wife."

"I promise you," said Mr. Osborne, rather sternly, "that the fancy of laughing at Adèle is taken from Isabella for ever; but what was that matter about me three days ago?"

"I tell you my head aches; I wish you would go."

"I will when you have told me that."

"Oh, it is only like all the rest. Isabella came up to me quite triumphant. 'I know why William married her,' she said, and she told me, but not how she had found it out, I warned her not to tell Adèle on any account. 'Oh, no,' she said, 'why should I? Let her think he was in love with her, little fool, and be happy in the delusion.' She always spoke so when Adèle was not there; and when she saw her, the wickedness all came back to her with the opportunity. I do believe she could not help it. But she did not tell her this time; she only said when Adèle came up, 'Adèle, I hope you will have got your good looks back by the time of William's return.'

"Is he going?" asked Adèle. She was quite used to knowing nothing.

"Of course he is!" cried Isabella, laughing. "Oh, dear! Auguste must be more communicative than that, or matters will not go on smoothly between Monsieur le Baron and Madame la Baronne. But mind what I say; get back your good looks, or you will lose William's heart."

"If they were all gone, I should still have that," said Adèle.

Isabella burst out laughing, and looked at me; but all she said was—

"Are you going with him?"

"He would take me if I were to ask him," said Adèle; "but I do not like to give him the trouble."

"My dear girl," says Isabella, sneering, "do not put him to the proof; stay on the safe side of your husband's love, by all means." With that, she walked out of the room, and Adèle stood where you are now, and pretended to look at the fire, that I might not see she was crying. After that, Isabella left her quiet for two days; at least, she said nothing opposite me until this evening, when she came up like a fury, and told her how you had not married her for love."

"And what did Adèle say to that?" asked Mr. Osborne.

"What was she to say to it, since it was true? She said nothing; she smiled; but I saw very well that it crushed her. She had borne up all along, because she thought you loved her. When she found that you did not, she gave in."

Mr. Osborne rose, and bit his lip; he walked about the room, trembling with nervous anger. He had learned nothing new; but he understood—with a vividness the brief scene in the saloon had not given him—the long, miserable torture his wife had endured; he felt in one moment the stings of insult, sneer, and pity, daily repeated, which she had borne for nearly two months, with a patience that sprang as much from woman's pride, as from her goodness. And all this had taken place in his house; all this his wife had endured, and he had known nothing. In his presence all had been fair and smooth. The jests had been mere playfulness; pity there had been none. And behind his back, his name had been a dagger in the hands of his sister, wherewith to stab his wife. She had ascertained that nothing else would inflict a wound, and that weapon she had used without pity. What! the woman whom in his heart he loved so fondly, that the mere thought of having conquered her coldness, had induced him to make to his sister's pride sacrifices Isabella would else never have won from him, had been, by the very one who owed all to that delusion, taunted with his indifference, upbraided with his coldness, humbled and insulted without pity. This was his reward!

"I wish you would not walk about my room, looking so savage!" exclaimed Anna, "*I* have nothing to do with it—and you make my head ache. I wish you would go. I never go to your room; I wish you would go."

He set his teeth. "If ever they dare to breathe a word to her again," he said, passionately, "not all her prayers shall stop me—not from revenge—I scorn revenge—but from justice."

"Oh! dear—how my head aches!" moaned Anna; "what an evening I have had of it! First Isabella, who comes up to fight like a wild cat; then Ma, who comes up to know what it is about; then Isabella, who comes again, mad with rage, to tell me that my dear Adèle is getting us all turned out; then you, who stamp and rave, as if that mended anything,—when, if you had only been a little fonder of your wife, all this—"

"Fonder of my wife!" interrupted Mr. Osborne, angrily, "fonder of my wife! Are you mad, Anna?"

"Well, you need not fly at me. Be as fond of her as you like. And pray," she added, moaning, "pray go up stairs to her, and leave me my room."

"It is not over yet," he moodily muttered, "it is not over yet."

"Is it my room, or is it not?" indignantly asked Anna.

Mr. Osborne calmed down and smiled.

"I beg your pardon," he said, returning to that suave courtesy through which he rarely broke, "but pray never tell me that I am not fond of her; it irritates me beyond control."

"Yes, but you are not going," querulously said Anna.

"I am gone. Good night."

He drew back the bolt,—Anna thus learned, to her horror, that she had been locked up,—and left at once; and, as Anna had advised, he went to his wife's room.

Adèle lay on her bed, in a dull and heavy slumber, which his entrance did not break. Jeannette sat at the foot of the bed, looking wistfully at her young mistress. Alas! what a pale, sad face it was, and how keenly he felt its sadness!

"You may go," he said to Jeannette, who reluctantly obeyed.

When the door closed upon her, he sat down on the chair she had left vacant, and fell into a sad and bitter dream. From what Anna had told him he understood but too clearly the drama of the evening. We have already said, that if he was absent, he was keensighted. He now saw to his own torment, how what his love and his kindness had failed to do, his involuntary coldness had all but done. How stung at the change she saw, and which others saw too; and stimulated by taunts, too bitter for any woman to bear—taunts, too, daily repeated—Adèle endeavoured to conquer back her lost lover; ay, it was as much, perhaps, to feel, show, and know her power, as because she really liked it, that she had asked to go with him—that she had come to him that evening beautiful, seductive, and fond. But what of that? it was too natural for him to resent it; and he knew the human heart—and woman's heart, especially—too well, not to be sure that in the end he would have been the gainer.

Ay, well he knew, though she did not, too well he knew that the imprudent woman who tries to charm a man's heart, shall never be able to keep her own, for she who remains cold is heartless. Well he knew, though she did not so much as suspect it, that she who voluntarily enters the magic circle of passion and love, may bid adieu to liberty. Her own spells will be thrown around her, and place her, whether she like or not, helpless and bound at her lover's feet; happy then will it be for her if she tried to please a heart that was already won.

But what availed it to Mr. Osborne to know all this? His

sister had put an end to the daring folly of his young wife. The bird was frightened away from the hand that was so ready to give it fond welcome. It was his—true—but the free will, the gay, foolish trust which he would have prized so dearly, his were not, though they might have been; a vain girl's wounded vanity, a bad-tempered woman's irritated pride had snatched away from him that dearest blessing, the liking hard enough to win of the wayward girl he had married.

It is easy to say "Love, and you will be loved." He had loved her, and she had wished herself dead. It is easy to say that patience and kindness will do anything; he had been patient, he had not murmured or reproached; the unkindness of others and all their taunts could not prove to him and to his conscience, that he had really wronged his wife. And what had that got him?—nothing; and if he were to live with her to the end of time, he did not think it would get him more than what he had, and could not but have, unless his wife had neither soul nor heart, her friendship and her esteem. It is easy to say, "Seek love if you really wish to win love." Some cannot seek love. It is against their nature. Mr. Osborne could be fond enough of his wife, and not hide it either; but to try to win her affection by prayers or by flattery, by simulated coldness or by alternations of fondness and indifference, were things impossible to him. "A man can only love a woman," he thought, "and show it according to his nature, and when that has failed—why, let it be."

Was there too much coldness, or was there too much pride in this? Pride there might be, coldness there was not. He loved her more, infinitely more than many a lover who has shed bitter tears at the feet of his mistress; but he simply held that love was never yet had for the asking; and who shall blame him that he did not pray for the boon he did not think thus to win? It did not, indeed, so much as enter his thoughts; and, indeed, these thoughts, though they might touch upon love, so far as it concerned him, had many another topic, many another bitter theme to absorb him.

Mr. Osborne was something besides an unhappy lover. He had a world of weary cares, enough to distract any man. Heavily they pressed upon him now. He looked at the pale face of his wife. She had one trouble; the name of his troubles was Legion. Bitterly he once more went over that evening. The falling man of business again learned with apparent unconcern the loss that half ruined him; the brother again sacrificed part of his private fortune to the sister who violated the sacredness of his privacy,

who turned into gall the one sweet drop in his life; and, alas! the unloved husband was again trifled with by that gentle little thing who lay there pale and still, who had come to him that evening, with pretty ways, half shy, half daring, half fond, half wayward—and for what?—to make him betray the foolish fondness of his heart, to waken there a fire she did not share!

Ah! wonder not if though she had succeeded but too well, wonder not if though he resented with passionate resentment the cruelty and the insults she had endured; if though he loved her dearly, wonder not that there still remained in his heart a touch of secret unspoken anger, love and pity could not quite efface away.

CHAPTER XL.

TIME THE CONSOLER.

THE evening was clear and mild; the snow was all gone; the winds were lulled; the stars glittered softly in a distant sky, and a crescent moon rose above the misty outlines of the mountains; pure, silver white she shone there, as she shines above the brow of Diana, the virgin huntress, the chaste and silent queen of night. But for once she won not Mr. Osborne's looks, she touched not his heart. He was walking up and down the road opposite the Manor, and with him walked grey-headed Docteur Guillaume, whose horse, a quiet, sturdy little mountaineer, Jean held at a short distance.

"I tell you nothing ails her," said Docteur Guillaume; "she is a little thing, but she is strong as steel. She is dull—amuse her—she is sad, make her happy. But my other patients are waiting; I have the honour to bid you a good evening."

He rode away, Mr. Osborne re-entered the house; he passed by the half-open door of the Hall; he heard the bland voice of his stepmother, the joyous tones of Isabella, the courteous speech of the Baron, they were merry enough; the storm they had raised had passed over them, and left them unharmed.

He entered his study; he found Adèle there as he had left her, lying on a low couch by the fireside; near her stood a low table, on which a lamp burned; its soft green shade screened her eyes from the light; her book was there if she wished to read, her

work if she wished to work, but she neither worked nor read. A little black kitten, which she had taken under her protection, played on the rug with her worsted balls—she heeded it not; languidly she was looking at the pale square of light which the moon shed through the glass-door on the carpeted floor. She did not so much as turn her head or change her look when her husband re-entered the room by the other door. He looked at her from the threshold; he never saw this pale, sad girl without remembering that other girl, more blooming than the rose in the garden, more joyous than the first sunbeam of the morning, whom he had married. "Amuse her," he thought; "there was a time when she knew not what it was to be dull. Make her happy! There was a time when she laughed in my face, and asked why she should be sad."

He closed the door, came forward, sat down by the little table, and looking across at his wife, asked how she felt. Adèle smiled languidly.

"Oh, nothing ails me, you know," she said.

Ay, nothing ailed her, save that since the day of the dinner a week before, she had fallen into a silent apathy from which nothing could rouse her. Books were powerless to please; study had lost all charm. Ay, nothing ailed her, save that she felt useless and worthless, without purpose or aim, a clog and a tie on the life of the man who had married her. Bitter thought, over which she brooded ceaselessly.

Mr. Osborne sat down, then he rose, and walked about the room.

"Is it possible," he said, coming back to her, and speaking with something like passion, "that I cannot make you happy? Ah! child, you will learn yet there is many a sadder lot than yours."

She took his hand, and raised it to her lips.

"I am a good man's wife," she said; "he is fond of me; he will let no one tease me now; he has brought me here, and here he keeps me, like a bird under his wing. He is kind, very kind; he reads to me, he endures my black kitten, though he detests cats; he talks to me, he does his best to amuse me. Why, then, should I not be happy?"

"Why are you not happy then?" he asked; "why that sad face, Adèle?"

"Perhaps because I think of you," she answered, smiling—"of you, whom weary cares are bending—of you, who shelter and toil for an ungrateful family—of you," she added, lowering her

voice, "who are tied to a little girl of sixteen—ignorant, foolish, without knowledge, without experience—unworthy of you in every respect. Ah!" she continued, raising her eyes to his, and speaking with that strange, daring sincerity, which was a charm in her, because it is, and ever will be, so rare, so imprudent, and so unselfish—"ah! if you had married, not me, but such a one as I know, a woman, a beautiful woman—good, true, accomplished, wise—fit in every respect to be your wife, to love you, and be loved—and if I had lived here with you two—your little friend."

"Enough, Adèle," interrupted Mr. Osborne, greatly pained, though he did not show it; for much as she had tried him, he could never, even in thought, have fancied Adèle the wife of another man. "We must not think of what might be," he added, "but of what is. You know I am fond of you—you say it. Man cannot give, woman cannot expect, more than affection."

"Ay, but you cannot say you married me for love," thought Adèle. Cruel thought! that haunted her like a spectre; that made memory a ceaseless sting, an ever-new torment; bitter truth, which his kindness rendered doubly bitter, which she remembered in his arms, with her hands clasped in his, which had burned itself into her brain like a thing never again to be forgotten.

"I am going away to-morrow," he resumed; "I cannot take you, you are too languid. I cannot leave you here alone; your old friend Madame Lascours will keep you company in my absence. She is coming this evening."

"She is coming!" cried Adèle.

"I believe she is come," said Mr. Osborne, rising, and even as he spoke the door opened, and the calm and handsome face of Alice appeared. In her joy, Adèle started to her feet with a motion so sudden that it upset the little table; down it fell with a crash that sent the kitten scampering to the end of the room, and as the lamp fell with it, sudden darkness followed.

"Jean, bring a light," said the quiet voice of Mr. Osborne.

Adèle knew how he hated rude motions and discordant sounds. She looked at his face, on which the firelight shone, and saw that he was smiling. Yet the presence of Jean with the light revealed a series of disasters. The lamp was broken, of course; worse, the carpet was stained, and far worse, a favourite book was only fit for the fire. Even whilst she embraced Alice, Adèle gave him a side anxious look; but all he said was—

"I am glad to see your old liveliness is come back; I feared it was all gone."

"All gone!" said Adèle; "all gone! you will see whether it is all gone!"

She looked happy and mischievous as of old, and sat on the low couch with Alice, her two arms clasped around the arm of her friend. Madame Lascours smiled down at her, and smoothed her hair, and seemed in a dream. Mr. Osborne looked at his wife, pleased with her radiant face; he took a sunbeam for an abiding day.

Scarcely was their greeting over, when Mr. Osborne was called away. Monsieur de Launay wished to speak to him on some business or other. The two friends remained alone.

"Are you really come to stay?" asked Adèle.

"Yes, as long as you like," was the calm reply of Alice. She did not see in the flushed face of Adèle the great change Mr. Osborne had led her to expect.

"Oh, it was so like him to ask you to come!" exclaimed Adèle; "he knew there was nothing I should like so well."

"I would have come before, if I had known you were unwell."

"I am not unwell, or, at least, nothing serious ails me; but he is so kind. What do you think of him? How do you like him?—very much, of course! No, pray do not give me a polite answer. Tell me truly whether you like him or not. I know that one must either like or dislike him; and yet how can one dislike him? I liked him the first moment I saw him!"

Madame Lascours was sitting on the couch with Adèle; her arm was passed around the waist of her little friend, her other hand held that of Mr. Osborne's wife. "Ah!" she thought, "well may he be fond of her—she was made to waken love, and charm it for ever."

"Well—what are you dreaming about?" asked Adèle, laughing. "You are just as absent as he is."

"Do you not know," quietly said Madame Lascours, "that I was acquainted with your husband years ago, in this very house?"

The eyes of Adèle opened wide. She looked surprised and a little provoked.

"I declare you are two of the most secretive people in this world," she exclaimed. "What! I have been praising him to

you and you to him all this time, and you never so much as told me that, either of you."

Alice smiled.

"It was so long ago," she said, "that we had time to forget it. Ah! water has flowed under the bridge, as people say, since those days."

"Is he altered?" asked Adèle, with some eagerness; "is he the same now that he was then?"

"He looks the same."

"Is he——" began Adèle. "Ah! how selfish I am, to think of myself only," she added, breaking off. "How are you? How do you feel since you have lost your husband?"

"The same as ever. Even poverty has not altered me."

"Poverty! you are poor now?"

"Yes! do you not know it? Monsieur Osborne wrote to me to offer me his services, but there was nothing to be done: the want of a slight formality in my husband's will has reduced me to beggary. His heirs, however, have agreed to allow me a little pittance, which I have agreed to accept; but for your husband, I should not, I believe, have even that. It is little; but it is sufficient to my wants: I live upon it with my cousin, Madame Gérard, whom you remember. She is old, pious, quiet. Monsieur Osborne can tell you how he found us sitting together by a calm fireside, when he called this morning; she knitting, and I reading aloud to her the lives of the saints."

"Ah! I did not know you had grown poor!" said Adèle, with much emotion; "I did not know it."

"And what matter if I have?" said Madame Lascours, with sad resignation. "My riches gave me no pleasure, and their memory is full of bitterness: I am haunted with the reproachful eyes, I ever hear the murmuring voices, of the poor, whom I forgot in my prosperity. It is not, God knows, that I would not have helped them; but I did not like to trouble my husband—as if he the most generous of men, and above all generous to me, would have minded it. And so I let the time pass by, and now that it is too late, Jesus Christ upbraids me that he was hungry and I fed him not, that he was cold and that I did not cover him, that he was in prison, and yet was never visited by me. And what is sadder than all," added Alice, after a brief pause, "is that I feel, that if I again had the power I should again not know how to use it. Alas! God help me! I can aspire to the most sublime heights; I can pine for the most divine flights; but a bird without wings might as well think to fly, as I to soar above this

miserable earth to heaven. But why talk of all this?" she exclaimed, with a low sigh; "it is one of my miserable weaknesses, that I must ever murmur and repine at myself. I came here not to talk of my shortcomings, but to see you. Your husband is very uneasy about you. You are certainly thinner. What ails you?"

"Nothing," a little shortly replied Adèle; "I am happy, quite happy. He is fond of me, as kind as a man can be, and though I am not very good, I like him too. What more is wanted for happiness?"

"Truly nothing," said Madame Lascours, with a sigh. "And you are either the happiest of women or the most unreasonable."

Adèle reddened and laughed.

"I suppose it must be the happiest," she said; "for truly I would change lots with no living creature. But what am I dreaming of?" she added, with a sudden start; "why there is no room ready for you—and, of course, *he* has not thought about *that*—good, absent man."

"Yes, he always was absent," said Madame Lascours, smiling, "but I dare say you would like to leave me—go, do what you like, it does not matter—I am at home here, you know; only do not give yourself much trouble for me. Anything will do."

"Yes, yes, I know," said Adèle; "yet if you do not mind, I will go; I shall not stay long away."

She went out, singing gaily. Alice looked at the fire and dreamed sadly. "Every human lot is blessed but mine," she thought; "for every one knows how to seize on happiness, and I never did know it, and never shall."

The sound of the opening door made her look round; it was Mr. Osborne who had entered. Alice saw his look search for his wife, and she said, quietly:

"Adèle is gone to prepare a room for me—she will soon come back."

Mr. Osborne sat down on the low couch by her side. He leaned his elbow on his knee and looked at the fire.

"She is altered, is she not?" he said.

"Not so much as I expected," replied Madame Lascours; "she looks both cheerful and happy, and I am sure she is. She told me, of her own accord, that she would not change lots with living creature, and if she said it she felt it."

Mr. Osborne did not reply; but still looking at the fire, he thought: "No more in her friend than in her husband will she confide. In that quarter there is, it seems, no hope." For he

began to understand a little the proud obstinacy which Adèle concealed under the gentle and wayward aspect of a careless girl. He knew, that if she had begun by saying to Alice that she would change lots with none, she would not retract the words by a later confession. He had hoped the contrary; he had hoped that she would open her mind and her heart to a woman, as he could scarcely expect that she would open them to him, and he was disappointed and provoked to find that it was not and would not be so. "Foolish child," he thought; "she will regret all this too late." He looked up to address some civil and quiet remark to his companion, then suddenly changed his purpose.

Alice sat listlessly, with her hands clasped on her knees, and her eyes raised up and fixed on a miniature portrait of the late William Osborne before her. Mr. Osborne saw that pure and clear profile, those dark eyes so sweet in their sadness, those half-parted lips that seemed to smile at grief, and he remembered the past, her life and his, with a pang.

"Yes," he said, in a low voice, "we two might have had a different destiny but for him, might we not, Alice?"

She did not answer one word.

He continued:

"The past is past, and beyond remedy; yours has not, I fear, been very happy. I need not tell you what mine was: wretched and bitter; truly Providence avenged you well."

"Do not think of that," she said, gently, "I never did think of it once; and I see with joy, that if your past has been sad, your present is blest."

Mr. Osborne looked a little impatient, and something he would have said, too, but Alice quickly laid her finger on her lips, and looking, like her, in the large mirror above the mantelpiece, he saw the figure of Adèle standing in the gloom of the half-open door.

She came forward, and sat down on the other side of Alice. Her husband looked at her attentively, and a little moodily, too. He did not believe in that gay voice with which Adèle spoke to her friend; behind that glittering eye and flushed cheek he saw the sad look and pale face.

"Foolish child," he thought again, "she will repent it when it is too late. I had my hour with Alice, and I took it not, and years of woe expiated that one brief error. She, too, has her hour with me now, and if she lets it pass by, how will it all end? God alone knows. I know but this; more than I have done I cannot do; once for all, I leave her to Time, the grand consoler—to

Time, who effaces all troubles and all wrongs—to Time, who has cured the sorrows of six thousand years.”

Early the next morning Mr. Osborne left Courcelles for Paris, where vexatious and troublesome affairs detained him two months. Does absence, like time, work wonders? Alice, with whom Mr. Osborne kept a private correspondence, gave good tidings of Adèle. Her strength had returned first, then her gaiety, then her good looks. Repeatedly she urged him to return, and become convinced that she did not exaggerate or draw too favourable a picture. At length arrived the time when he could judge for himself. Without previous warning or announcement, he suddenly left Paris, where he had nothing to keep him, and set off for Courcelles. He reached Nantua on a clear and calm April afternoon, hired a boat, and crossed over the lake to his old Manor of Courcelles. A rich, soft sunlight was descending upon the landscape and the lake; the sky rapidly grew bright and burning, clouds of bronze and gold, looked like the fabled horses of the sun, leading away his car to rest behind the mountain. The reddening front of Courcelles rose above its skirting garden of light, spring green; feebly and idly the waters of the lake washed the basement of rock and wall, but the garden was lone as any enchanted garden. No dreaming Adèle was leaning over the balustrade, counting the pebbles in the water. Mr. Osborne landed, dismissed his boat, and entered his garden unseen.

He went on without meeting a living creature, until he reached the alley that led to the conservatory. There he first heard, then he saw, Adèle and Lilian. He stood pretty much in the same spot where he had stood when he had heard his wife wishing herself dead—that is to say, below the level of the raised alley which led to the conservatory; and then, as on that sad day, he could see Adèle and not be seen.

She sat on the last of the stone steps, and Lilian sat by her. She was telling her little stepdaughter a fairy tale, of which Mr. Osborne only heard the end.

“And so Prince Charmant, having delivered the princess from the tower, where the fairies kept her, took her away to his own land, and made her queen of all he had.”

“Queen of all he had! what does that mean?” asked Lilian.

“Why, I am queen of all Monsieur Osborne has. Do you understand that?”

But Lilian had already forgotten her question, and was looking at a bee flying through the air, heavily laden, and evidently late and anxious. Lilian, even more ignorant than Anacreon’s

Love, called it an animal with wings, and wanted to know all about it.

"His name is Bee, and I know no more," replied Adèle, who looked lazy; "give me a kiss, and go and fetch my round hat."

She sank down on the sunny stone, reckless of her rich silk skirt of pale violet, and delicate white muslin body. Her head rested on the step above that on which she lay with her loosened hair falling down and sweeping it idly, and no softer pillow than her clasped hands, beneath it; Lilian laughed and embraced her stepmother rather more ardently than could be pleasant, even to the most affectionate of stepmamas, but Adèle felt too comfortable to move in order to resist. She only laughed and said, "Do not," and asked for her hat, which Lilian at length condescended to go and fetch.

The child had climbed up the flight of steps with the slow toil of short legs; the sound of her little feet running through the conservatory above had ceased, and Adèle still lay in the sun, graceful, indolent, and flushed. For a while she watched the orange light passing away from the deep vivid green of a clipped yew, then she closed her dazzled eyes and sank in the sweet and delightful torpor that creeps to our very hearts on mild, sunny evenings. Truly Madame Lascours had not exaggerated. Adèle looked well, strong, pretty, and happy.

Suddenly she started up pale and frightened, light and insidious though his approach had been, his wife had heard him. Mute was now her greeting as he stood smiling by her side.

"I alarmed you," said Mr. Osborne, rather sorry.

"You startled me; but I knew it was you, of course."

But his concern increased, for she stood before him trembling from head to foot. He drew her towards him and said still smiling, he thought her nerves were stronger.

"Nerves! I have no nerves!"

She tried to laugh, but could not; deeply, strangely disturbed was her whole aspect; it expressed neither joy nor welcome, nothing but an emotion which she evidently could not control, and which Mr. Osborne could not understand. He took her hand and looked at her rather sadly.

"Well, Adèle," he said, "what ails you?"

Her colour returned; she laughed, threw her arms around his neck, and said gaily—

"Why do you come like your own ghost?"

"Then I did alarm you?"

"Yes—no—I do not think you did. Let me go for Lilian."

"I do not want Lilian, but you; let me look at you, child,—you look quite well again."

He turned her face to the fading light and surveyed her tenderly. He was pleased, he was happy to find her looking not merely as well as ever, but infinitely better and prettier. We love everything in what we love: its beauty, its weakness, its infirmity, all are dear, and dear to Mr. Osborne for this most excellent reason, were his wife's good looks. He would not let her leave him, nor did she any longer strive to go; she sat down with him on the steps, she laid her head on his shoulder, she played with his hair, and, what pleased him better, for she pulled it rather more than he liked, she answered all his questions with gay frankness.

"How has Isabella behaved?" he asked; "tell me the whole truth, Adèle."

"Isabella and I have not exchanged twenty superfluous words since you left. In these twenty words there was not one that could in the least annoy me. Oh! you may look as piercingly, as penetratingly as you like," she added, gaily, "it is so."

"And Mrs. Osborne?"

"Civil, without pity."

"Of course Monsieur de Launay and his aunt have paid all due respect to the mistress of the house?"

"Of course. Anna is a little jealous of Alice, and still keeps her room; Lilian is very much grown, and is a good girl, and that is really all."

"And what about yourself? Your letters have been marvelously laconic on that subject."

"What was there to say? I read, I worked you a chair, I got your letters and answered them, and that is all."

"And all is well now, Adèle, is it not?"

They had risen. His two hands rested on her shoulders; his look, fond and serene, rested on her flushed face.

"Oh, yes, all is well," she stammered.

"Thank God, Adèle! thank God! we will, then, have that greatest of all blessings"—domestic peace; he was going to add, but finding the word too cool, he altered it with a smile, and said, "domestic bliss."

Adèle did not reply.

"You are very cool," he said.

"Am I?" she asked; and with a sort of hesitation that amused him, she passed her arm within his and tried to become

affectionate; but she withdrew it quickly, reddened, and looked indignant.

"You are laughing at me," she said; "I know you are."

He protested he was not, and succeeded in pacifying her; but even as he spoke, his eye measured her from head to foot.

"I declare you have grown," he said, much amused, "a full inch by your skirt."

"Well, why should I not grow?"

"I might reply, that there is so little room for improvement?"

"Yes, but you would not mean it?"

"Why not?"

"Here is Lillian," was his wife's only reply. "Make haste, Lillian—quick—quick!—he is come back."

But Lillian had all but forgotten her father; she kissed him indeed, but did not seem sure of his identity; and she was much more anxious to give Adèle her straw hat than to welcome her papa. He did not care about her coolness; he told her to go in; and with the intimation that the evening was chill, he led his wife in too. She seemed rather reluctant to enter the house.

"Madame Osborne and Isabella are out," she said, hesitatingly.

"So much the better," he promptly answered.

"Would you not like to go to Anna's room?"

"Not yet."

"Alice is gone to see Madame Gérard. I do not know when she will come back."

"Do we want company?" he asked, as the door closed on Lillian; for after crossing the conservatory, they were now entering the drawing-room. Mr. Osborne sat down on a couch, and made his wife sit by him. She looked disturbed, yet not displeased; her agitation struck him, and brought a slight flush to his cheek; for if Adèle looked like anything just then, she looked like a girl in love who remains alone with the man she loves. She is glad, of course, but she would give anything to be miles away. Mr. Osborne remembered how quickly she had recognized him, yet how shy and quiet had been her greeting, and he looked at her with a keenness of which he was not conscious. The blood rose to her brow and branded her guilty. But Mr. Osborne had been mistaken once by these deluding signs, and Pride warned him not to fall into a second humiliating error. He took no notice of his wife's emotion; and to give her time to recover, he was beginning a grave discourse, when the door opened, and Ma-

dame Lascours entered, and behind her Jeannette bearing the lamp, and beaming with smiles.

Mr. Osborne rose and welcomed Alice with a cordiality which surprised his wife; for rarely in his letters had he mentioned her name.

"How well you look," he said, half-admiringly.

Madame Lascours looked, indeed, handsomer than ever; perhaps it was her dark attire; perhaps it was the full, clear light of the lamp, as she stood with her white hand resting on the table, that gave her beauty a vivid Venetian glow. Even Adèle was dazzled. "She is wonderfully beautiful," she thought. "I wonder what he thinks of her? I must ask him."

"Courcelles agrees with me," simply replied Alice.

"I have not yet been able to settle that matter for you in Paris," he continued, "but I have not lost all hope."

"If I succeed, I shall owe all to you," said Madame Lascours.

The truth flashed across Adèle—her husband and Alice had corresponded privately. These two whom she loved so much had had secrets—only business secrets, indeed—but still, secrets from which she, the wife, the friend, was excluded. She remembered how Alice had laid her finger on her lips on the evening of her arrival.

Ay, they had secrets.

"How do you find Adèle looking?" continued Madame Lascours, laying her hand on the shoulder of her friend.

Mr. Osborne rested his hand too on the other shoulder of his wife, and he looked down at her fondly. He did not answer in speech the question Alice had put; but his look told plainly the pleased admiration Pride would not let him confess.

Adèle looked from one to the other, and smiled.

"What am I between them both," she thought—"a child."

"How long is it since you have been on the lake?" asked Mr. Osborne, bending over her.

"Not once since we were married."

"Well, then, I shall take you and Madame Lascours there to-morrow. I saw something to-day which I wish to show you."

"Did you—did you really?" cried Adèle eagerly. "Ah, how delightful it will be!"

She laughed; she was merry. Mr. Osborne and Alice exchanged pleased looks.

"All is well," he thought, truly happy, "all is well. It was a light grief—light has been the cure."

CHAPTER XLII.

THE FIRST OF MAY.

BRIGHT and joyous, like a first of May morning, rose the next day, which was, indeed, a first of May. Soft and warm was the rosy sky; the mountains had a look of tranquil rest, the lake slept, whilst sunbeams crept over it, and from the wide old garden there rose many a joyous song of love and delight, many a merry carol, which a happy bird poured forth, not knowing why.

Mr. Osborne walked up and down the alley, where he had found his wife the preceding evening. His arms were folded, his look was bent; he had come there for solitude, but solitude he did not find. Mrs. Osborne walked down the steps, and met him graciously.

"My dear William, how are you?" she said, extending her hand; "I am glad, I am truly glad you are come back."

Courteously, though very coldly, Mr. Osborne returned her greeting.

"I hope you found Adèle and Lilian both looking well," she pursued. "The change in your wife I consider amazing."

"She looks very well."

"And I hope, William, that she has told you that none of those unhappy mistakes—I really can call them nothing else—which arose formerly between Isabella—"

"We will not speak of that," he interrupted; "Adèle is very far from complaining."

"You gratify me. It has been my object in life to pass calmly and happily through the most perplexing;—but I see you are full of other matters—good morning."

She bent her calm and handsome head, and walked away, undetained by her stepson. She had scarcely left the alley, when Isabella, blooming and gay, stepped in, like a Dryad, through an opening of the hedge, and appeared before her brother.

"Good morning to your Lordship!" she said, gaily.

"Good morning, Isabella," he gravely replied.

"Yes; but I am come to say something beside good morning," she said, pertly. "I suppose you bring news. What are they, if you please?"

"My affairs in Paris are over, at least, for the time. There is nothing to delay the partnership now."

The eyes of Isabella sparkled.

"Is that all?" she asked.

"Not quite. I wrote to Madame de Launay last night, and her answer has come. She and her nephew will come to-morrow, and spend a week here."

Isabella drew a deep breath, and looked relieved.

"At length," she said, "we shall have a real conclusion. I was beginning to think I should not dance at the Tuileries next winter, I really was. How solemn you look, William; you are not angry with me, are you?"

"What for?" he asked.

"Why, about that little affair I had with Adèle, before you left," she bluntly replied. "I know you were desperately angry then. I suppose you thought I had half killed her! William, women, and girls too, are made of harder stuff. Look at your wife's blooming cheeks and bright eyes; listen to her when she laughs, and ask yourself if I broke her heart."

"Certainly not," he answered, in a peculiar tone, "certainly not, Isabella. She has improved amazingly during my absence. I never saw her look so well as I saw her look yesterday evening, when I found her lying here on these stone steps."

"Yes, she rather likes that style!" said Isabella, with a curling lip.

"It is a style that suits her; she is little, graceful, and supple. Even you, Isabella, would have admired my wife, if you had seen her so. It was not prejudice, I assure you; but I thought I had never seen such a pretty, happy-looking little creature."

"Good morning," said Isabella, haughtily, "I came to talk on business, not on your wife's beauty."

"My wife's beauty!" internally echoed Mr. Osborne, "my wife's beauty, indeed!"

"The man is mad," thought Isabella, as she walked away; "I wonder if Augustus will go on raving about me to other people in that style! Pity *he* did not see her lying on the stone steps."

Here she stopped in the narrow path she was pacing, and standing back, she allowed Madame Lascours to pass, scarcely acknowledging her morning salutation with a cool bend of the head. Alice was a great deal too handsome to be in the good graces of Isabella.

"Pray, was it Monsieur Osborne's voice I heard near the conservatory?" asked Madame Lascours.

"It was," was the short and ungracious reply; and Isabella walked on.

Mr. Osborne was ascending the steps when Alice entered the alley; but as he reached the conservatory she stood by his side. With surprise she saw his stern and displeased look—very different from the happy serene face of the preceding evening.

"It is a fine day," she began.

"Remarkably so."

"Adèle is not here?"

"No, her head aches."

"How well she looks, does she not?"

"Wonderfully well."

"When I first came here she was pale and languid, but she rallied rapidly, and became stronger, and prettier too, than I ever knew her before."

Mr. Osborne smiled.

"She has been very busy during your absence," pursued Alice; "she has studied, she has read. Books and your letters have been all her delight."

Mr. Osborne smiled again.

A little hesitatingly Madame Lascours said—

"She is young, ardent; and I do believe that to be more worthy of you, as she thinks, has become with her a sort of passion."

They were walking up and down the conservatory, and as he walked, Mr. Osborne carelessly hit the heads of his tallest plants something like King Tarquin in his garden. Suddenly he paused, and confronting Alice, he said briefly—

"She cried herself to sleep last night, and if you see her this morning, look at her well."

"And what did she cry for?" asked Alice, amazed.

"God knows! She did not think I was awake. I did not ask. I scarcely think it was with joy for my return."

Madame Lascours could not speak, she was so astonished. Mr. Osborne did not give her time; he saw Morel coming up the alley; and with a hasty apology to the friend of his wife, he left her, and went to meet his foreman.

"Is she not fond of him, after all?" thought Alice bewildered; "was she merry and well only because he was away?" But this seemed incredible; Alice could not and would not believe it. At once she went up to the room of her friend. At the door she met Jeannette; she asked how her mistress was?

"Bad—bad," groaned Jeannette; "all wrong again, all wrong." And she went down moaning.

Without knocking, Alice entered. Adèle was sitting by her

open window, pale, languid, apathetic. The last two months had vanished, and Alice felt that she gazed again on the sad girl to whom Mr. Osborne had brought her one evening.

She questioned her, and got vague replies; she tried to rouse her, and she failed. Adèle remained listless and cold. Madame Lascours looked out of the window on the garden. At a distance she saw Mr. Osborne re-entering the house; and her heart swelled with a dull pain that was more the child of memory than born of the present. "What!" she thought, "he the good, the perfect, accomplished, handsome gentleman, must love her the child, the mere girl, in vain! His presence, which ought to be delightful, his return, which ought to be the fulness of all joy, are the misery and the torment of his wife! Ah, it is too much, it is too much!"

Whilst she was looking at Mr. Osborne, Mr. Osborne's wife was looking at her, moodily.

"Why am I not beautiful, like her?" she thought. "I know that pure, noble style of beauty is that which he most admires! Why am I not like her, an intellectual, accomplished woman? I am clever in my way, but I know nothing. He never could take, in talking to me, the pleasure he took in talking to her last night. Why am I not like her, perfect and good? For myself I am just as well pleased to be as I am; but for him what a difference it would make to have a wife like her, instead of a wife like me. And can he help, too—ah, can he help, when he sees us both together—can he help making a comparison between us?"

"Well, what are you thinking of?" anxiously asked Alice, turning back to Adèle.

"I was wishing to be like you," she replied, with the frankness which she was ever but too prompt to display at her own expense; "I do believe, Alice, you have every gift a woman can have—rare beauty, mind, virtue, goodness, everything!"

"But the power to make use of those gifts," interrupted Alice, reddening slightly, "everything but the gift to charm. The good fairies were generous to me; but the wicked fairy who had not been invited to the christening stepped in, and said—You have given her mind, it shall be powerless to please her or others; you have given her the love of goodness, I will destroy in her the power of doing good; and, finally, you have given her beauty; I decree that her beauty shall waken the cold admiration of every eye, and never the love of one heart."

"Ah, bah!" said Adèle, trying to smile, "William spoke to

me so learnedly about your Greek profile last night, that I thought—he is fond of me, of course, but I wonder if he would not like me more if I too had a Greek profile? Altogether I can tell you he admires you amazingly.”

“Pray never tell me that he does,” said Alice, with unusual warmth, “or that any one does admire me,” she added, so sadly, that Adèle was struck; “it is like talking to exiles of their country; it is a pleasure; yes, but it is also a pain too keen. Ah, why did we talk of all this?” she continued, pressing her hand to her forehead; “what was I saying?—yes, let me see, that it is a beautiful morning, and that you must really rouse yourself, were it only for the sake of its being the first of May.”

“The first of May!” cried Adèle, with a sudden start; “it is the first of May! Are you sure? Are you not jesting?”

“It is the first of May, there is no doubt about it.”

Adèle got up, clapped her hands, and laughed.

“I am seventeen to-day,” she cried, “I am seventeen to-day! I will be as merry as a lark until midnight. I will really be happy and joyous the whole of this day, and perhaps a little bit of to-morrow too. What do you say to this wise resolve?”

“Keep to it,” replied Madame Lascours, smiling at her sudden mirth.

“Of course I shall. I will prove it to you and to him too. Where is he? below writing; he little expects me. But first, how do I look?—Well, eh?” she added, with a doubtful look at Alice.

“You look very well,” was the quiet but encouraging reply. And it was true, for with Adèle to feel happy and look beautiful were one.

“Then adieu to you, I am gone.”

She darted out of her room, then down the staircase, and broke in on her husband in his study, light and joyous.

“I am seventeen to-day!” she cried, breathlessly; “I have just found it out, and I am come to tell you.”

He looked at her doubtfully. What fit was this?

“Well,” she impatiently exclaimed, “you are not amazed, surprised, delighted, to have a wife who is seventeen on the first of May!”

“I am a calm man,” he replied, smiling; “and I take great blessings calmly. Nevertheless, come nearer, let me see how you look on your seventeenth birthday.”

She obeyed and went up to him, he passed his left arm around her, and looked so kindly in her face, that her lids fell, though

she still smiled. "I must be mad," she thought, "not to see that he is fond of me."

"You did not warn me," he said; "wonder not that I have no gift for this great day; but I shall repair the omission in due time."

"You could give me your ring," said Adèle, quickly.

Youth is full of fond, foolish fancies which maturer years smile at. Mr. Osborne wore a signet ring, an antique found in a tomb in Greece, and on which two hands, one of a woman the other of a man, were engraved in the act of clasping. With it he sealed all his private letters. Was it, as Mr. Osborne fondly thought, the work of the famous Dioscourides? We know nothing about it, but this we know, that Adèle had set her heart on getting that ring from him.

"If he gives it to me freely," she thought, "it is a sign that he really loves me; if he hesitates, I shall know that he loves me, and no more."

Now Mr. Osborne being a hesitating man, there were ten chances to one that the unexpected request of Adèle would make him wonder and pause, but the one chance was favourable to her; without hesitation he took the ring from his finger and put in on hers. It was too large, but Adèle did not think of that; her eyes sparkled with joy, her face beamed with smiles, she threw her arms around him, and embraced him warmly.

"Oh! I am going to be so good and so happy to-day," she cried, "you will see. I shall speak to Isabella and Mrs. Osborne in amity, which I thought never to do again, I assure you; but I must be in peace with the whole world on the day when I am seventeen, must I not?"

"Of course," he replied; but internally he thought, "all this is very charming, very sweet; but how long will it last?"

It lasted the whole of that day.

Ah! youth, lovely youth made to charm, fleeting gift we slight, or regret and never prize when we hold it, is there, indeed, a heart so cold as not to delight in thee, even when thou art lost and gone. Mr. Osborne was anything but pleased with his wife. Her sudden sadness, her tears, had offended him deeply; but when she came to him in her smiles beaming like the morning, when he saw her sunny face, when he heard her light voice about the house, his displeasure melted away, even as his eyes softened, even as unconscious sweetness tempered the irony of his smile. It was the first of May, and she was seventeen; atoning virtues that effaced the very memory of her sins.

Faithfully Adèle kept to her resolve of being in amity with her mother and sister-in-law. She went to find them in the Hall, and was both cordial and gay. Mrs. Osborne was gentle and dignified; Isabella was good-humoured enough. She spoke of her approaching marriage, condescended to consult Adèle on one or two trousseau questions, then abruptly observed,—

“And when is Madame Lascours going?”

“Not yet, I hope.”

“You are very fond of her?”

“Isabella, my love,” imploringly put in Mrs. Osborne.

“Surely, mamma, there is no harm in that.”

“I love and admire Alice,” said Adèle, warmly; “she is a beautiful creature, is she not?”

“You are generous,” was the ironical reply.

“What, do you not think her handsome?”

“I think her humble.”

Mrs. Osborne gave her daughter a warning look, and Isabella answered it in speech.

“Oh, you need not be afraid. I have had enough of interfering.” And she spoke again of her trousseau.

Adèle left them and went up to Anna's room. Anna was very cross. She felt neglected and wronged, and Anna was never silent under wrong.

“You have quite forsaken me,” she said, querulously; “and all for the sake of your new friend.”

“She is an old friend, Anna.”

“And when is she going away?”

“I will not let her go away,” said Adèle, impatiently; “I want her here.”

“But it cannot be pleasant to her to be here,” sharply said Anna.

Adèle looked surprised; and Anna looked like one that had committed a blunder.

“You know well enough,” she said, “that this is not a pleasant house.”

Adèle did not question her, she pacified Anna, and left her apparently unmoved and unconscious, but she seized the first opportunity she got in the afternoon to say to Madame Lascours,—

“Alice, is it true that it is unpleasant for you to be in this house with me?”

They were crossing the court on their way to the garden, where Mr. Osborne, who had been engaged with business the whole day, was waiting to take them on the lake. On hearing the question of Adèle, Alice stopped short near the old well, and looked down at her friend and said drearily,—

"What have they been saying to you?"

Adèle, sorry to have spoken, reddened, but did not reply.

"Can they not let me be in peace, after so many years," said Madame Lascours, clasping her trembling hands.

"Oh! I am sorry—I am very sorry to have said a word!" cried Adèle, really pained.

Alice laid her hand on the shoulder of her young friend, and pressed the other to her heart.

"The cold water in that cold well," she said, "is not colder than I am now; it is not more calm, more deadly still; but if you throw a stone in it, it will be troubled; and thus it is with me—the past is past and dead, but a word breaks the stillness of years."

"I shall never say another word to you—never—never!" cried Adèle; "forgive me—tell me you are not angry."

Alice stooped and kissed her.

"I have always loved you," she said; "but if they should again speak—again try to divide us,—remember, Adèle, that I have never loved you more than I love you now."

They crossed the court and entered the garden, where they found Mr. Osborne sitting on a bench, waiting. The day was still warm and beautiful, but it was waning, and Adèle wore a thin muslin dress.

"Jeannette," said Mr. Osborne, "will you go and fetch the cloak of your mistress, if you please?"

Jeannette, who was sitting at some distance, rose and left her wheel to obey at once. Adèle looked after her a little remorsefully. She seemed to have become estranged from her old friend of late, and on this day, her birthday too, she had not so much as spoken to her. She turned to her husband, and said:

"I wish you would take Alice to the orchard, and show her those beautiful apple trees you spoke of to me. I feel a little tired, and I shall sit here and wait for you. Then when Jeannette has brought me my cloak, and you are come back, we can go on the lake."

Madame Lascours looked as if she would have objected; but Adèle frowned at her.

"This is my birthday," she said, "and I must be obeyed."

They went—she looked after them, and sighed, but not with grief.

"What sorrow is going to befall me," she thought, "that I feel so overflowing with happiness. Oh! I am young, very young still, and life is very sweet. He is so good, so kind, so fond of me, spite all my capricious ways. He has made me the mistress

of this old house, where, till he came, I was no better than a stranger; the garden is mine now, the beautiful old garden, the orchard too; every good gift, every blessing, came with him, the greatest of all blessings. Blessed be the good, kind God that gave him to me, and me to him."

Her hands lay clasped on her knees, smiling at her own thoughts, she looked at the sunny old garden with its crown of dark hills, at the warm flushed sky above them; the whole earth was a temple wherein it was sweet and delightful to worship and to love.

"Here is Madame's cloak," said the subdued voice of Jeannette, "shall I put it on?"

Adèle nodded, and when the cloak was on her, she threw her arms around Jeannette's neck and kissed her brown cheek.

"What sort of a cloak did Madame wear this day seventeen years?" she asked, gaily.

Jeannette smiled, and shook her head.

"Ah! Jeannette!" cried Adèle, in the fulness of her heart, "blessed be the day on which I was born, to be made the happy woman I am to-day."

Jeannette looked earnestly at her young mistress. No more than Mr. Osborne, could she understand a change so sudden from melancholy to joy; and, like him, she thought: "Let it but last."

"Monsieur and Madame Lascours are coming back," she said.

Adèle unwound her arms from the neck of Jeannette, and looked round. Mr. Osborne and Alice were coming up the alley. Adèle looked at them like one in a dream. They paused in the path and exchanged some remark which she was too far to hear. The sunlight fell on them both, it played around their two figures with a glorious glow that dazzled her. Yet she saw them well, with the keen and vivid distinctness which great light gives to objects. She saw their looks meet, she saw them smile, and it seemed as if looks and smiles were blending into one. A strange, keen thrill ran through the whole being of Adèle. She turned round, and said to Jeannette with a suddenness of which she was not herself conscious:

"Who was it Alice was to marry before she became Monsieur Lascours's wife?"

Jeannette was taken by surprise, and looked troubled, too troubled indeed to reply at once.

"Madame must not think of that now," she said, at length.

Adèle laughed.

"You do not think I mind what took place when I was a little girl," she said, gaily, "besides I am his wife, and she is nothing to him you know."

She paused and looked at Jeannette, perhaps she expected a contradiction: she got none; for Jeannette did not speak. Adèle pressed her two hands against each other with some force, and looked from Jeannette to the two figures now coming towards her; then she shook her head like one who forbids thought to come, and lightly sprang forward to meet them. Her husband received her with a smile, and looked down pleased at her flushed cheeks and bright eyes. Alice, too, smiled, but like one who looks on apart.

"You see, I have not lost what you call my old liveliness," said Adèle.

"You look feverish," he replied, a little anxiously.

Adèle took hold of his hand, and half frowped.

"What did you say?" she asked.

"I said you looked feverish."

Adèle took his little finger, and put it between teeth, which might be teeth of pearl, but which had the qualities of most teeth, and could bite.

"There!" she said, dropping his hand, and laughing to see him shake it rather ruefully, "every time you say I am feverish I shall serve you so."

And an emphatic nod confirmed her words. Mr. Osborne turned to Alice and smiled.

"She is seventeen to-day," he said, and he fondly stroked the head of his young wife.

Adèle took his arm, and looked up at him with strange earnest eyes, but she said nothing. They walked down the broad alley until they reached the stone steps that led to the water. The boat was ready, they entered it, and Mr. Osborne rowed them away into the centre of the lake. The sun was setting behind the mountains; dark was their broken edge on clouds of gold, red and yellow streaks passed across a pale aerial sky of fading blue, long lines of light streamed along the lake, but sombre, full of mystery and gloom, looked the waters that washed the stone base of the austere mountains round.

"What a beautiful evening," said Alice.

"Divine," said Mr. Osborne, letting his oar lie idle.

Alice sat with her hands clasped in her lap, and her eyes upraised, and he sat looking at her with unexpressed, but evident admiration.

"Why am I not with the old man in his grave?" thought Adèle; "he divided them whilst he lived, even as I divide them now. He is happy and at rest, after his long, sad life; why am I not like him, after my little life, so sad, though so short?"

Mr. Osborne had resumed his oar, the boat was moving on. Adèle bent over it, and looked into the still water. She saw a pale sky, and dark mountains for ever moving on, and alone unchangeable her own sad face. She smiled at it, and thought, "If, instead of her image, it was Adèle herself, that lay far down in the bottom of that lake, I wonder what they would feel! Alice would regret me, I know she would; he, too, would be sorry, yes, he would, indeed; but old love, first-love, never dies. Before a year, Alice would be his wife; Lillian would love her as she loves me now. And who would think of little Adèle then?"

Her tears fell fast in the calm lake; they troubled its still surface, and broke her image with tremulous circles. With a sort of despair, she, too, looked up at the sky. "God is good," she thought; "He will either help me to bear, or He will take me away from this misery."

"Is it this we have come to see?" asked Alice, in a tone of surprise.

The boat had stopped; it had neared land, and was heaving gently in a narrow bay. At once Adèle knew the spot, for before her, with a bluish background of mountains, trees, and mist, rose, above the rocky shore and rugged path, the grey old church, in which she had been married. Half of the low-arched door was open; she saw the altar within, with a streak of sunshine lighting it up; she saw the iron railing, before which they had knelt—the rows of tombs that rose above the surface of the stone floor, through which they had passed; and looking up above the porch, she saw, too, that the belfry had got its promised bell.

Madame Lascours had stepped out; her sombre figure was entering the church; they were alone in the boat, with the dark and silent lake around them. Half shyly, half freely, Adèle went up to her husband and kissed his cheek, like a good and grateful little girl.

"What were you crying for last night?" he asked, gravely.

"I shall not cry any more," she said, reddening, "I am seventeen, so good-bye to tears."

She sprang on shore; he followed her more slowly. He felt vexed with himself that he could not be angry with her; that, do what she would to irritate or provoke him, this mere child ever found the way back to his heart.

They entered the church together; Madame Lascours was kneeling in the half-gloom of a heavy pillar; they went up to the altar; before it burned reverently a feeble little lamp, that mingled its red glow with the gorgeousness and the splendour of the setting sun.

Adèle knelt down by the railing, but she could not pray, for prayer is an act of the heart, as well as of the will, and her heart would not obey the bended knees and moving lips. She could, indeed, shade her eyes with her hand, and not look at her husband, who stood before her, reading an inscription on one of the tombstones, but she could not prevent the inward vision from beholding him again on their marriage morning standing before that altar, calm, proud, handsome, and happy.

"A perfect man," she thought, involuntarily looking up; but Mr. Osborne was going, and Alice stood on the door-step, beckoning to her with a smile. Adèle rose, followed her out, and entered the boat without a word.

Mr. Osborne and Alice spoke about the church and praised what they called its character. Their discourse was architectural and artistic; Adèle heard them subdued and silent. What did she know or care about that church, save that it was the church in which she had been married?

They reached the garden and landed. The evening was beautiful and mild; instead of taking the broad alley, they entered a side path which brought them to the old lime-tree. It was in bloom, and its blossoms filled the air with perfume. Mr. Osborne had had a bench placed beneath it. With some eagerness Adèle said,—

"Let us sit down—pray do."

Reluctantly he yielded, for he feared she might take cold; yet serene and mild was that May evening. The pale, full moon had arisen; her soft yellow light fell like a golden veil on the opposite harbour, and its statue no longer shrouded with snow.

"On such a moonlight night as this we went to the Roche aux Fées some years ago," suddenly said Mr. Osborne, speaking to Alice across his wife, who sat between them; "do you remember?"

Alice said she remembered,—Adèle, too, remembered. She remembered her wedding-day, and the snow-storm that had found them both under that old lime-tree; she remembered the snow flakes in her hair, where the soft breeze passing in the boughs above, now shed the fragrant lime-blossoms; she remembered her husband bending over her raised face, and for the first time, em-

bracing her; she remembered all this, and with the unreasonableness of strong feeling, she forgot that on her wedding-day she had been anything but happy. She forgot that his tenderness had dismayed her, that she had looked with heart-sickness, and fainting, and dread, to that future which was to be spent for ever with him. She effaced all that from memory, she left nothing there but his fleeting fondness, but the joy so serene, though as yet it now seemed so delusive, that shone on his aspect. And with a bitter pang she said to herself, "If he had known then that Alice was a widow, would he have married me? He would not—he could not." She looked at them both; she knew they did not wrong her, even in thought; she felt as incapable of jealousy as they were of the perfidy that would have justified the feeling, but she felt, too, that her husband had loved the woman who sat by her side as he could not love her; she felt that that woman had a power of giving him happiness denied to her; and again looking at them both, good, handsome, made for each other and severed by her, she felt that her heart was breaking. "I must die," she thought; "life is too bitter to drink thus drop by drop."

The stillness of evening leads to silence; none of those three spoke. A nightingale began to sing in the tree above them. He sang his love and its joys, and Adèle felt as if she could sing not her love, but her sorrows. Without warning, without prelude, she sank her head on her husband's shoulder, and clasping his hand in hers, and with her other hand in that of Alice, she began one of the old ballads which she loved. It told in rude speech and with a monotonous chaunt the sad story of an unloved wife whom her husband cast away. Surprise kept Mr. Osborne mute; he had never heard Adèle sing before, save by snatches, and he did not know that she possessed a voice of rare sweetness and beauty.

And as she sung that evening Adèle had never sung before and never sang again, for she sang from the depths of a suffering heart. Sweeter than the now silent note of the nightingale rose her voice on the calm of the night. Mr. Osborne was keenly alive to beautiful sounds; with silent delight he listened to that old ballad which his young wife sang so sweetly on his shoulder, and Adèle did not pause; stanza after stanza of the complaints fell from her lips, and each sounded sweeter than the last. But when she reached the saddest part of her story, the casting away of the unloved wife by her husband, the voice of Adèle took a tone of lament so sad and so strange, that it pierced the hearts of the two rapt listeners.

"For Heaven's sake! do not sing so," cried Mr. Osborne; "sing no more."

"Pray do not," anxiously said Alice.

Adèle looked at them both; the light of the moon fell on their two faces; his eyes were dim; her tears were flowing; she smiled, and sang pale and tearless until the end. Then, indeed, she looked at her husband in such a sad, despairing fashion, that his heart was moved with indignant grief.

"Adèle, what did you promise in the boat?" he asked.

"Am I crying?" she replied.

"God help us both!" he said, rising, and he walked away.

"Adèle," said Madame Lascours, "what is all this? What ails you? Why do you torment him? What is it? Can you not be happy?"

"No," replied Adèle, a little passionately; "there it is, Alice, I cannot—I cannot."

CHAPTER XLII.

WHAT AILED ADÈLE.

MR. OSBORNE and his future partner had been out together the whole day, and together they rode home in the grey of evening and the faint light of an early moon. They had been silent long, but as the pale and indistinct front of the Manor rose before them, the Baron found his tongue.

"I am very much annoyed with this new delay," said Monsieur de Launay.

"It is tiresome," said Mr. Osborne, quietly.

"Tiresome!" echoed Monsieur de Launay, with the tone of an indignant lover, "why, it puts off my marriage full three months; for it will take three months at least to settle that matter in America, and get the papers."

"Three! four, you mean."

Slowly and pensively Monsieur de Launay rode on; then suddenly reining in his horse, he exclaimed, like one struck with a sudden thought—

"But why not have the marriage first, and the partnership afterwards? it would come to the same thing, you know."

He spoke so naturally. Who would not have thought that he

meant what he said? Who could think that the offer was made as a courteous acknowledgment of the charms of Isabella which her brother could not in honour accept, and must, indeed, in common honesty, decline? A bitter smile curled Mr. Osborne's handsome Grecian lip. "Mock love, mock honour, mock courtesy!" he thought, "counterfeits that pass for current all the world over, could ye not leave in peace, were ye bound to desecrate the beauty and the stillness of this heavenly night?" And as his sad look wandered over the veiled landscape, above which spread the sky, where faint stars lay scattered, he remembered that wonderful *Night* of Michael Angelo, that weary woman who bows her head and closes her eyes, not so much to sleep as to forget a world of sin and falsehood, a life of shame and lies.

His long silence surprised and alarmed Monsieur de Launay. Was it possible that Mr. Osborne knew so little of life, of the world, of business, as to take him at his word? But unwilling to retract, and confident, moreover, of Madame de Launay's power to extract him from any predicament, he was going to insist, with an increase of lover-like warmth, on the necessity of immediate union, when, to his great relief, Mr. Osborne quietly said—

"I am very much obliged to you for so disinterested an offer, but it is impossible for me to accept it. Three or four months' delay," he added, with perceptible irony, "will not lessen your married bliss."

Monsieur de Launay laughed.

"It is very well for you to speak so," he said—"did you wait or leave to time what happiness the present offered?"

"Ay, truly," ruefully thought Mr. Osborne, "mine is a happy lot, and I have good reason to remember my hurry."

They were within a few yards of the Manor; the drawing-room windows were open; the sound of voices came forth on the evening air; a white dress appeared on the central balcony; Mr. Osborne recognized his sister; Monsieur de Launay his mistress. He took off his hat, and bowed low; she waved her handkerchief, and the Baron's handsome bay horse began to prance and display the perfect horsemanship of his rider to those fair eyes. Joli was more quiet, or perhaps he knew with equine sagacity that his master had no eyes to charm: he remained very still, whilst with a smile half stern, half scornful, Mr. Osborne looked on at the Baron's curvetting, and listened to Isabella's little screams of terror. "Ay, play at love, both of you," he thought; "better after all the woe-begone looks of my little Adèle, than this hollow sham."

But everything must end with time; trite truth which the Baron's prancing verified. It ceased; and Tom, the Baron's English groom, who had kept at a respectful distance, now rode up, and took charge of his master's lively horse.

"How late you are!" said Mrs. Osborne, turning round as the two gentlemen entered the drawing-room.

"We dined at Nantua," said Mr. Osborne, vainly looking round the room for his wife.

Madame de Launay was playing at chess with Mrs. Osborne; a strange contrast between that little dry, nut-like woman, with the keen eye, and that graceful handsome lady with the serene aspect. She looked inquiringly at her nephew.

"It is a most melancholy fatality," he said, in a tone of feeling concern; "we must actually send to America for those machines."

Madame de Launay took off her spectacles and put them on again.

"Well," she said, coolly, "it is only a little delay, you know."

She returned to her game, whilst Mrs. Osborne, less self-possessed, bit her lip, and lost her move.

"Well?" said Isabella, going up to her brother with assumed carelessness.

"Madame Talleyrand," he replied, looking over at the two chess-players, "is too clever for me. This new delay, her work from beginning to end, will make us linger on through the whole summer."

The eye of Isabella flashed, her lip trembled.

"He is a wretch," she said, in a low, indignant tone.

"He is a commercial man, and he has an aunt," said Mr. Osborne, quietly. "If he were free, I do believe he would marry you to-morrow. Smooth your brow, all is not over yet."

And leaving her with this piece of comfort to the Baron, whom he saw advancing, he crossed the room, and went and sat by Alice.

"Where is Adèle?" he asked.

"She went up to Anna's room a little while ago," replied Madame Lascours, not willing to say that it was when she heard her husband returning that Adèle had left the apartment. But he guessed it, and he smiled with some bitterness.

Since her birthday, a week before, Adèle had assumed a haughty, though perfectly civil, coolness, which Mr. Osborne had found anything but pleasant. Surprised and sorry, he had tried to dispel it by kindness; and he had failed so completely, he had

been so coldly repelled, so frigidly assured that his wife was well in spirits and in health, that he had not felt tempted to renew such unwelcome efforts. Still less—though he had not seen her since the morning—did he now feel tempted to intrude on the retirement which she sought. If she shunned his presence, why she might. Accordingly he remained by Madame Lascours, talking to her, unconscious that for the last ten minutes his wife was sitting opposite him, looking at him and Alice with strange earnestness.

Alas! a feeling had come over her which would quicken the dead. In vain she worked; her needle moved, but her eyes saw it not. In vain she took up a book; it dropped on her lap. In vain the Baron, rather dismayed at the snappish replies his fair lady gave him, came and sat by her, and devoted his amiability to the Mistress of the house. Adèle smiled and answered, and looked at him; but the effort was like that of dividing her soul from her body. At length her pride revolted against this; she forbade her thoughts and her looks to wander beyond a certain circle—"That you shall not pass," she said to them; and turning to the Baron, she gave him her full attention.

We are all like the poet, taught by suffering. Premature sorrows had given Adèle a power of self-control beyond her years. Monsieur de Launay was descending learnedly on the new novel Adèle was reading; and as his intellect, though neither strong nor deep, was quick and well provided with French tact and clearness, Adèle heard him with a sort of pleasure, and answered with a vivacity and an *à propos* that surprised herself. She did not know that pain resisted doubles every power of a human being. Monsieur de Launay heard her with pleasure, and gazed at her with an admiration of which he was not perhaps conscious; but Adèle, always pretty, now looked beautiful. With silent, indignant anger, Isabella watched all. She saw her lover, half bending forward, with his tufted chin resting in his right hand, look at her sister-in-law. She saw, whilst Adèle read to him some passage in the book that had struck her, how his admiring gaze rested unchecked on the young flushed face, on the pure, bent brow, and modest, downcast eyes of Mr. Osborne's wife. She could bear no more; the lessons of the past were forgotten by one whom experience had never taught. Yield she must to the irresistible wish of inflicting on the woman who thus tormented her some of her own jealous bitterness; she crossed the room, passed behind the chair of Adèle, and looking over her shoulder at the book she held, she said carelessly—

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"You are still in the first volume; they are in the second, I believe."

Adèle forgot her resolve. She looked beyond the magic circle will had traced, and in the glow of light shed by the chandelier, she saw her husband and Alice who stood talking across a narrow table. Mr. Osborne held in his right hand a half-closed volume: evidently the theme of his discourse; he spoke and Alice listened. The light shone on their two faces; Mr. Osborne's was as usual pale as marble, but a faint glow lit that of Alice, and a soft light shone in her dark eyes. The book dropped on the lap of Adèle; for awhile she felt petrified, then a strange, passionate storm came and silently convulsed her whole being.

"Do you feel faint?" asked the Baron, struck with her sudden and deadly paleness.

"I am thirsty," she replied, without looking at him, for her soul had passed in her eyes.

Monsieur de Launay rose to ring the bell, but Mr. Osborne, who had just taken a glass of water from a side table, and was in the act of raising it to his lips, turned round on hearing the voice of his wife, and stepping across the room he handed the glass to her. She took it with a trembling hand, and drank it slowly; as she returned it to him, he paused in the act of taking it back; he was shocked to see her so white, and he looked down at her fixedly. The power of enchantment seemed to rivet her eyes on his face; she looked until his grave and sad though noble features seemed to write themselves in keen and burning lines on her brain. She felt like one dazzled, who would give worlds not to look, and who must look on till blinded. At length, trembling with secret pain, she closed her eyes, bowed her head, and leaned it on her hand.

"Is this room too close for you?" asked Mr. Osborne.

"No, thank you," she replied, without looking up at him; "I was only thirsty."

He walked away. She saw the skirt of a black dress moving towards her; Alice was coming.

Adèle did not give her time; she rose and left the apartment.

When the door had closed on her, Adèle flew rather than she ran down stairs, swift like a shadow she passed through passage, court, and garden, and never stopped until she reached the stone steps that led to the lake. On the lowest she sat down, then with a low moan she laid her head on the cold stone above the faint ripple of the waters.

Beautiful and calm were the spot and the hour to which Adèle brought her fevered heart. What heavenly rest in that sky, per-

vaded with moonlight! What peace slept on those silent mountains! what stillness there was in the very eddies of that quiet lake! Alas! she saw, she felt nothing; she was conscious but of the water that flowed near her ear, but of the wild passionate woe that filled her poor young heart.

"Yes," she thought, "that is it! I love him and I am jealous! It is not for his sake I lament now. Let him suffer—he cannot suffer half so much as I do. It is not his sacrifice I regret—I am his wife, and I would not, if I could, let him be free. He has given himself to me, and I cannot and will not surrender the gift. It is not humiliation I feel; the least scrap of his liking ennobles and honours; but it is that I love him with my whole heart—as much as one being can love another, and that he does not love me—that he regrets her. That is it—that is it."

Ay, that was it. She loved, and she was jealous. To the revolt of youth had succeeded the submission of necessity, but love had not followed. She had wished herself dead because she was the wife of a man whose affection oppressed her. Religion, duty, the very hopelessness of her bondage had tamed this wild spirit into acquiescence. She had learned to endure the husband whom she had always admired; but the happy moment was gone by; he was cold; her enemies were triumphant. She suffered keenly in her affection and in her pride, yet she was not cast down; she was but a little girl, ignorant, unworthy of him, but he loved her and he had married her for love. She could defy their insolence, even as she could conquer his proud coldness yet. Ay, she could, if she but wished it, waken in his heart all the tenderness of the husband, all the fondness of the lover. She did wish it, and she succeeded; she triumphed,—what woman would not have triumphed?—but still Adèle did not love Mr. Osborne. Then came the galling discovery—the humiliating fall. She was not—she had never been loved. His indifference divided them, like a bottomless abyss. She was not the joy and delight of his heart, the pride of his life; she was a painful accident in his existence, a something that had come athwart him and his liberty.

The suffering was too great, too keen. It awoke a new being in the hitherto passionless girl; it gave her years—their ardour and their feelings. Out of that deep grief, love, unconscious and pure like the love of youth, was born. She awoke one day glad, she herself did not know why, full of hopes she did not question, of desires she did not define. There was a glow on life like the glow of the morning sun, an enchantment like that of the early

hours. Everything was sweet, pleasant, delightful. She neither knew, nor wanted to know, why or how it should be thus. She only knew that it was so. "What matter about love?" thought the prudent girl, "we are married, and we are fond of one another. What matter about love, indeed?" And she serenely folded her hands above a heart where love was calmly reigning.

She did not suspect it; she could not have believed it. Nay, more, she would have derided it. She only wished that her husband would return quickly, so that she might explain to him that new delightful theory of being fond without love. He returned, and she was mute; he was kind, and she felt frightened; he looked at another woman with an admiring eye, and devouring jealousy, though unconfessed, awoke in her heart. And now she could think of nothing else; and night and day, and whether they were present or absent, she saw these two before her. "And I was seventeen the other day," she thought, in the solitary garden, "and I may live years, weary years, and I must go on loving him more and more, and he liking me ever less and less."

Oh! it was the torment of torments; her tears flowed like rain on that cold stone step; her moans rose plaintive, though low, on the stillness of the night; she called, with the passionate vehemence of one whom sorrow had seldom tried for the love she had all but hated, for the death she had implored to free her from its infliction. Suddenly she ceased, trembling she started to her feet and hid her burning face in her hands; she had heard a step in the alley; was it he coming to kiss away her tears, to hush in a fond embrace her childlike lament? She hoped, she wished, it was or might be; he did not love her, but still there was a charm in his tenderness, a charm sweet to feel though bitter to remember. With a beating heart she waited until the voice of Jeannette said,—

"Ah, Madame! Madame! you will take cold!"

Adèle angrily removed her hands from her face, and angrily said,—

"What brings you here? I wish to be alone."

"I shall go," quietly replied Jeannette; "but I must first say two words to Madame. Ah, Mademoiselle, Mademoiselle," she cried, yielding to sudden emotion, "pray do not think of the past—pray do not; they have forgotten it as if it had never been. For Heaven's sake! do like them, or you will be wretched."

Shame, grief, kept Adèle mute. What! she had not been able to hide her miserable weakness, her love, and her jealousy

from her old servant—they were both visible to the eyes of Jeannette. She bowed her head and cried bitterly.

"Ah, Madame!" began Jeannette.

Her mistress interrupted her.

"Hush!" she said, raising her hand, "never speak so again; never say to any one that you found me here."

And she went down the alley towards the Manor, at a pace Jeannette could not hope to overtake.

Adèle entered the house and passed by the drawing-room door with a swelling heart. In there she could not go to betray to his eyes what the eyes of Jeannette had seen so clearly. She went to Anna's room, and it was not until the door had closed upon her that she saw her husband sitting with his sister.

CHAPTER XLIII.

A VIGIL.

"WELL, but you need not take Adèle away," said Anna, as Mr. Osborne rose and passed his arm within that of his wife.

"I want her on business, and I came here for her," he answered, quietly.

"What business can you have with her?"

"Important business, which admits of no delay, Anna—so good evening."

Anna shut her eyes, and moaned, and thought it very odd that people could not keep to their own rooms, but must needs come to hers.

"I will not go into the drawing-room," wilfully said Adèle, as they reached the door of that apartment.

"I am not taking you there," replied her husband, and he led her down to his study.

A bright light burned on his table, covered with papers; he drew a chair before it, placed pen, paper, and ink in readiness, and quietly bade Adele sit down. She obeyed, with some wonder. Mr. Osborne saw that the door was securely closed, then came back to his wife, and sitting down by her, he laid his arm on the back of her chair, and looked gravely in her face.

"You proved to me once," he said, "that you were a clever and prompt arithmetician; may I now put you to the test?"

"What am I to do?" she asked, eagerly.

"I shall tell you presently. You will do it all the better if you understand my drift; and there is plenty of brain in that little head," he added, pushing back the hair from her clear broad forehead, "to comprehend even such dull questions as the relative value of steam and water-power."

The face of Adèle burned, but she looked at him.

"Do you really think me clever?" she asked, a little agitatedly.

"I really do. Well, what ails you?"

"Oh! I am all perversity, and you are all goodness," she cried, throwing her arms around his neck. "I behave so shamefully to you, and your kindness, your gentleness, never vary."

There was some truth in this. Mr. Osborne behaved infinitely better than his wife; and she, now all sorrow, all penitence, all tenderness, very sweetly entreated to be forgiven the last week's sins. How could he be angry? how could he help forgiving, and more than forgiving her?

"Why can I not be fairly vexed with you once for all?" he asked, looking down at her. "Why, when I feel most aggrieved, must you by word, look, or speech, remind me of that cordial little girl who welcomed me on the evening of my arrival, who spent her little money, and brought forth her rare old wine for my table? I wonder what you will do next to torment me?"

"I will answer that question when you have told me why you brought me here," demurely said Adèle.

With a start, Mr. Osborne remembered the business he had forgotten. He became anxious at once.

"You have made me lose time," he said, "and I cannot enter into details. This much I must say; I need not tell you that the manufacture of iron is my business—that you know; but I dare say you do not know that the fusion of the ore requires a fire more intense than the mere burning of fuel in a furnace can produce?"

"Yes, indeed, I do know that; it requires a strong blast or current of air."

"Just so. Steam or water wheels are the agents that produce this current; steam is surer, water is cheaper, but faithless; steam is regular, firm, steady, like man, and water is capricious and wayward—" Mr. Osborne paused and looked at his wife.

"Like woman," she said; "thank you."

"We are not getting on at all," said Mr. Osborne, smiling; "I never lose a second with Monsieur Morel, and you have been here half an hour, and I have done nothing. I must send for him."

He pretended to rise.

"No, no—pray do not," she cried, "I shall not say another word; but do not send me away."

She seized his arm in the ardour of her entreaty, and looked up in his face with an earnestness that struck him. Once more he felt certain of it; his wife was fond of him. She saw him bite his lip and redden, and she could not imagine why; but he had sufficient self-control to go on with the steam and water-power matter.

"Water being cheaper, I use it," he said, "and in my case it is safe; if it were to fail me, it would indeed be ruin; but it has never failed yet, and I will venture to add that it will not fail without due warning. Madame de Launay is all for steam, and for new American machines; it does not suit me to accede to her wishes, and it becomes me to prove to her that she is in error. For this I require your aid; write down in figures the replies to the questions I shall put, and you will do me good service."

Adèle took up her pen; Mr. Osborne rose, and walked up and down the room, glancing at a slip of paper which he held, and requesting her to answer questions, all based on the past and present water-power of the stream that fed the forge of Courcelles.

At this work he kept her a full hour; then requesting her to stay, for that he might want her again, he left the room. In less than five minutes the door opened again; the short, dry figure of Madame de Launay entered briskly: her tall, fair, suave nephew followed, and behind both the calm and handsome husband of Adèle. She looked at him with involuntary and unconscious pride. "There is not another like him," she thought, "not one."

Madame de Launay had gathered her brows, and was looking at her shrewdly.

"So you work with your husband," she said, taking a chair near her.

The face of Adèle beamed; she had never received a compliment she liked half so well.

"Monsieur Osborne is happy in having such a companion to share his labours," said the Baron de Launay, caressing his chin. He was standing behind the chair of his aunt, and he looked full at Adèle as he spoke.

Monsieur Osborne, without being jealous, had several times thought that if Monsieur de Launay would look more at his sister and less at his wife, he for one should much prefer it, and there was just a touch of dryness in his tone, as he said—

"You will be happy to learn from me that the American matter can be set aside. It has, in reality, nothing to do with the partnership; it can delay it, it cannot do anything else."

He spoke a little sharply. Mr. Osborne hated being what is commonly called imposed upon, and in the present case he had resolved to bring the De Launays to a crisis, and not to be made the tool of too clever a business lady, and the dupe of a mock gentleman. Monsieur de Launay, on hearing him, looked surprised, and said, "Indeed."

Madame de Launay took a long pinch of snuff, and at length observed: "Will you have the kindness to show us that?"

Mr. Osborne took up the paper on which his wife had written the answers to his questions, and glancing at his own little slip of memorandums, he proceeded to enter on a long but clear and convincing refutation of what he had called the American matter; he proved, and justly, that it had nothing to do with the département de l'Ain, and though he was too politic and too polite to say so, he allowed Madame de Launay to see that he considered it a *ruse de guerre* and no more, and Madame de Launay of course liked him none the less for his perspicacity; she merely questioned once or twice the accuracy of his calculations, upon which Mr. Osborne looked at his wife, who took up her pen and modestly but positively proved to the elder lady that she was right, and not wrong. It amused Mr. Osborne to see their two faces meet above the paper; one brown, withered, acute as age; the other, blooming and fair as girlhood. Very graciously Madame de Launay confessed herself conquered, and complimented Mr. Osborne on the business-like talents of his wife.

"Yes," he said, half carelessly, "I have got a good and willing little clerk; but for her I should never have been able to get through this matter this evening."

"Ah! what a house we two would have made of it," thought Madame de Launay, looking with regretful envy at Adèle. "I would have formed her with my own hands—well—well, it was not to be."

"That is all, is it not?" she said, aloud.

"All with which I need trouble you for the present," courteously replied Mr. Osborne.

Madame de Launay rose and took her nephew's arm. Adèle

too, rose, but as she reached the door her husband quietly said—

“Stay.”

She stopped short with sudden obedience; he walked out with his guests; the door closed: she remained alone.

She returned to her chair, and sat down. “He will come back immediately,” she thought. But no; half an hour, then three-quarters of an hour elapsed, and he came not. The heart of Adèle beat, her brow burned; she leaned her cheek on her hand.

“He is talking upstairs with Alice,” she thought; “he is sitting with her in that deep window they are both so fond of.”

She looked up; the door opened; Mr. Osborne entered, carrying a small tray in his hand.

“What is that?” rather shortly asked his wife.

“Coffee for you.”

“And why not for you, too? Stay with me!” she added, entreatingly.

“Impossible,” he replied, with a smile, “Madame Lascours has just received an urgent letter, and requires my assistance.”

“But why am I to stay here?” asked Adèle, rather petulantly.

“Because I have a new series of questions, which you are to answer for me. You will find them in this sheet, from one to seven. Use all the despatch you can, and bring the replies to me; but simply put them near the statuette of Joan of Arc. This is not an open battle, but a secret ambuscade: I wish to be prepared for attack; but it is not desirable I should seem to need such preparation.”

Without waiting for a word of objection or reply, he turned away. He went upstairs to talk to Madame Lascours; he left her alone in his study to perform the office of a calculating machine.

The coffee Adèle did not touch; she was all fire, all burning eagerness to do her task and go upstairs. With a swiftness that amazed her, she wrote down the replies to Mr. Osborne's seven questions, folded them in a square, and ran up to the drawing-room, trembling and impatient.

Scarcely had she entered the apartment when her look, as if by magic, sought and found her husband. He sat by Alice near one of the heavy-curtained windows; the light of the chandelier scarcely reached the half gloom of the spot; yet Adèle needed no second glance to know that they were there. She gave them but that one look; yet their attitudes, their bearing, their whole as-

pect, were impressed on her mind like a vivid picture, never to be forgotten. She placed the square of paper, as she had been told, by the statuette of Joan of Arc, then she went and sat down near Madame de Launay, who was knitting assiduously.

"You must have quite a gift for figures," said the elder lady, admiringly.

"Perhaps I have," replied Adèle, smiling; "but I have no gift for knitting. Ah! what a pretty pattern!"

She bent over Madame de Launay's incipient counterpane, attentive and admiring; but she also saw her husband; she saw him rise and go to the light; she saw him take the paper from beneath the statuette, unfold it, and glance over it; she saw even the pleased look that flashed across his face, the half triumphant smile with which he looked over at Madame de Launay, and guessing that he might not be sorry to defeat the ambuscade at once, she raised her voice and called him to admire—

"That exquisite work of Madame de Launay's."

"Is Monsieur Osborne a judge of knitting?" asked Madame de Launay.

"He is a judge of everything," replied Adèle, rising and yielding to her husband the place she occupied by the woman of business. Very composedly Mr. Osborne answered Madame de Launay's mistrustful look; Adèle walked away to a neighbouring table, and turned over a volume of engravings which she did not see. Alice came up to her.

"What ailed you this evening?" she asked, gently bending to look in the face of her friend.

"I felt feverish," replied Adèle, looking up; "how good you are," she added, involuntarily, and she took the hand of Alice and pressed it. A strange love attracted her, spite of herself, to her unconscious rival; that calm, handsome face soothed her; there was a charm in the touch of that cool, white hand, the look of those serene dark eyes fell on her like peace.

"You are feverish," said Madame Lascours, softly touching her burning forehead; "child, what can ail you?"

Adèle did not answer; Madame Lascours followed the direction of her glance; she saw it fastened on Mr. Osborne. Adèle was eagerly watching him and Madame de Launay. They were deep in discussion, that was plain. The old lady shook her head and objected, but he persisted, and at length the knitting dropped on her lap, and she gave her antagonist a raised and admiring look. He received it calmly, went on talking, then rose and came over to his wife and Alice. "He would not come if I

were alone," thought Adèle, turning her flushed face away; yet it was she whom her husband addressed.

"Have you made Madame Lascours promise to return quickly?" he asked.

"Going! you are going!" cried Adèle.

"Yes," calmly replied Alice; "Monsieur Osborne's exertions in my behalf are unwearied, and there now seems some prospect of success; but I must go to Lyons and have a meeting with my late husband's heirs. I have two against me and one for me, so it is a doubtful matter, you see."

Adèle stammered something, she herself did not know what; she had but one feeling and one thought—joy—joy troubled but deep.

"Do you know I think it must be late," observed Madame de Launay, putting down her knitting; "at all events I am an old woman, and I want sleep, so good evening."

"Do you still persist in your unkind intention of deserting us to-morrow?" asked Mrs. Osborne.

"Madame de Launay does not like Courcelles," said Isabella, a little sharply. She addressed no one in particular, but spoke at the Baron, who murmured an inaudible reply.

Mrs. Osborne went on entreating Madame de Launay, who good-naturedly replied that she should be delighted to stay, but could not; she had preserves to prepare for, and finally to make. No one attempted to answer this argument, which she evidently held unanswerable. She rose and left. Her departure was the signal of a general breaking up. Alice, who was to go early, took a quiet leave from Adèle; in a few minutes Mr. Osborne and his wife remained alone in the drawing-room.

Adèle turned over the pages of the book of drawings, and looked at him; his calm, smiling face, had vanished; the mask which we all put on in the world; the mask, indeed, which takes the name of good breeding, and without which there is no living in society, was dropped, and a face full of cares appeared behind it. He stood absorbed in thought, his arms folded, his brow knit, his look downcast.

"Poor fellow!" thought Adèle, with that familiarity which love takes, as well as the sublime and pathetic mood, "what a weary life he has of it."

"You need not wait for me," said Mr. Osborne, suddenly looking up, "I have to write."

He bade her good night, and left her. Adèle went up to her room, informed Madame Leroy that she did not require her ser-

vices, and waited until that majestic lady had retired to the privacy of her apartment. She then threw a light silk cloak around her, and stole down through the silent house to her husband's study. He did not hear her enter until she stood by his side as he sat writing; he then turned round sharply, and gave her a surprised and anxious look.

"What ails you?" he exclaimed; "do you feel unwell? Is anything the matter?"

"Nothing," she said, a little shortly; "I only came to sit here with you. I could not sleep upstairs."

And to show him that she had no desire to intrude on his confidence, she sat down, and took a book. He looked at her, and an amused smile, which she could not see, stole over his face. He let her turn a page, then he said—

"I think, since you are so sleepless, I may as well make you useful as let you read. You will have plenty of time for that book to-morrow."

At once Adèle was by him, her eyes beaming with pleasure. He drew a chair for her by his side, and gave her as much work in the way of deciphering illegible notes and transcribing letters, as she could wish for. She worked with silent zeal and diligence, never once lifting her eyes, until at length her husband said to her—

"Why, Adèle, you are more exemplary than Morel himself."

Slowly Adèle raised her look to his face; he was leaning back in his chair, and thence he looked at her. The eyes of Adèle returned to her paper; she extended her hand to turn the page of the letter she was copying; his arrested it.

"We have had enough writing for this evening," he said; "I can see that you are not tired—of course not; but I confess I am. We will sit up awhile, and you will talk to me."

Adèle reddened and bit her lip. "Indeed I will not," she thought; "you can find plenty to say to Alice when you sit with her by the window; and if you can find nothing to say to me, I will not speak." Accordingly, and though Mr. Osborne still held back her left arm from the papers, her right hand idly scribbled with her pen on the back of a letter, at which she looked intently.

"What, not a word!" he said with a smile, which she felt, though she did not see it; "what ails you this evening? Where were you when I looked for you everywhere; here, in your room, in the room of Anna, who received me very crossly; where were you, pray?"

"I had gone to the garden," she answered, reddening; "I felt so hot." And to check the reproof which she felt coming, she immediately added—"You may well speak of having an exemplary clerk in Morel. I heard nine strike, and I saw a light in the counting-house—he was not gone yet."

Mr. Osborne gave a start, and dropped her arm.

"Child, what are you saying?" he exclaimed; "Morel was gone before I came back."

"And who, then, was in the counting-house?" she asked. "I saw a light."

"No one; you saw some other light."

Adèle shook her head negatively.

"I know every light that burns within five miles," she said, "even as I know that the bell which now strikes one is the bell of Saint Jean des Roches, though you can scarcely hear it, it is so far and so faint. Say anything you like, but do not say that."

"But what should take him there?" said Mr. Osborne, his brow contracting into a frown.

"He is a traitor," said Adèle.

"An adder without fangs," replied her husband, with a scornful smile. "He can be of use to me; I defy him to hurt me." But though he spoke thus, the anxious frown did not leave his brow; he rose, he walked up and down the room; he paused, and thought; at length he opened a drawer, took forth two keys, one of the counting-house, the other of an iron safe, with a secret lock, where he kept a ledger of the private matters it was not necessary that Monsieur Morel should know; and merely saying to his wife, "I shall not be long away," he coolly left his study, and walked down the steps leading to the garden.

Adèle saw him depart with a throbbing heart; vague apprehensions of danger and coming misfortune hung over her, but she did not attempt to detain him; she did not say, "Let me go with you." She waited a few minutes, then she stole out and followed him at a distance. Like him, she went down the broad alley; like him, too, she thought to leave the garden by the low door. But he had locked it. "As if I could not get over the wall," she thought. A loose stone, the branch of a tree, a fearless leap down, and she stood, rather stunned, but safe, on the other side. Before her rose the counting-house; a light burned in it; on the glowing background she saw in dark outline the figure of her husband. She crossed the little iron bridge, beneath which foamed the mountain-stream, and went round to the

counting-house door. Mr. Osborne had left it ajar; but he heard her at once, and turned round sharply.

"Do not scold me," she began, deprecatingly, "I could not stay in the house, and I had my dress around me—so you see, I could not be cold."

"I see no such thing," he said, trying to look displeased,—vain attempt, that did not deceive her, for smiling securely, she observed—

"Well, what have you found?"

"Nothing, as yet. The books are in perfect order, as correct as arithmetic can make them. You must have been mistaken; nothing could have brought him here. I have looked in the safe, and found my own ledger there; all is right."

Adèle did not believe that all could be right; but she vainly looked around her for some sign or token of wrong. The dark, cold room was in scrupulous order; the heavy books seemed to defy censure; they looked so large, stiff, and stern; by them flared on Monsieur Morel's desk the little twisted wax taper, which her husband had brought with him, lit on his entrance, and carelessly laid there. Suddenly he gave a start.

"Adèle, did you bring this?" he asked.

She turned round. He was holding a wax taper similar to his own, but extinct.

"I did not bring it," she said at once.

Mr. Osborne frowned. He again opened the iron safe; he took out his private ledger, and whilst Adèle held the light behind him, he looked attentively over it, from the first page to the last. He found nothing, nothing save a drop of wax on the last page but one. The finger of Adèle was laid on it at once, but her husband had already seen it. She looked at him, but he only smiled, closed the book, and put it back.

"Well," she said, a little impatiently.

"Well," he replied, "Monsieur Morel is fond of reading at night, and he uses a wax taper—like *Psyche*, when she wakened Love, who was sleeping. Whether he has wakened love in the present case, is another matter!"

He spoke lightly—but how severe was his brow!—how pitiless looked his anxious face!

"Ah!" said Adèle, with involuntary emotion, "I hope you will never be angry with me!"

"With you, child! Why should I be angry with you?" he asked, smoothing his aspect.

"Then I hope you never will. I could not bear it," she said.

All ungentle emotion passed away from his face; he smiled so sweetly, that it seemed to her as if he could never have been displeased; and in his mildest tones he asked—

“What could make you think of that?”

“Ah! you looked so angry!”

“Then I was not wise. That fellow is not worth anger. Besides, as I told you already, he is powerless. He may unlock the iron safe, he may read his master's private book, but there is a lock that will baffle him still—a book he cannot decipher.”

“Where?” asked Adèle, looking round, “not here, surely.”

“Here, in truth, and before you, too.”

She looked and saw nothing, but her husband, who stood before her smiling; and she understood that the lock Morel could not open, the book he could not read, was his master.

Mr. Osborne walked up and down the counting-house. His arms were folded, his look was calmly defiant, the smile that curled his lip was full of scorn.

“I have,” he said, “a profound contempt for cunning, and unmitigated scorn for deceit; their very nature is shallow; let them do their worst—they are powerless.”

Aloud he spoke no more, though he was evidently communing with his own thoughts: Adèle remembered that evening in the garden when she had watched the light in the counting-house, and wondered what sort of cares they were that made that light burn there. She was there now, there with him, there as his wife, and though it did not seem as if he had or wished to have secrets from her, she felt both very near to and very far from her husband. She looked at him earnestly. “I wish he would not look so,” she thought, “he will make me afraid of him;” but, of course, with feminine perversity, she liked him none the less for that.

“What ails that little girl, this evening, that she must always be looking at me?” thought Mr. Osborne, surprised; for the sin of looking at him too much was not one into which his wife had fallen often since his return. But, too polite to put so delicate a question, he merely observed that the room was cool, and that it was time to go; and taking her arm, he led her out and locked the door behind him. When they reached the garden door, he paused; for it was shut as he had left it.

“Pray, how did you get in?” he asked.

“I did not get in, I got over,” was the prompt reply.

“Over! well done.”

“Did you never get over a wall?” asked Adèle, a little shortly.

Mr. Osborne could not say that he had not, and prudently dropped the contest. The moon had vanished in the sky; the night was dark and silent, gloomy was the garden, keen and chill blew the air from the mountains across the lake. As they passed by the stone steps where Jeannette had found her moaning, Adèle asked herself what evil dream had possessed her; she felt calm, happy, not in the least jealous. This gentle and contented mood followed her to her husband's study, whither she returned with him. With diligent hand Adèle put away the papers from his table, whilst with a wearied air he threw himself in a chair and leaned his brow on his hand. Suddenly she went up to his chair, and, standing a little behind him, she said:

"Ah! what troubles—what cares there are on your mind!"

"Yes, child," he sighed, "plenty!"

It was the first time that he acknowledged so much to her. His head had sunk back wearied on the dark velvet chair, and Adèle, leaning above him, looked down at his pale face. Through the open glass door came the cool air of night, above a dark outline of mountain broke a grey space in the eastern sky; the night had waned in this anxious vigil which Adèle had shared with him; a sweet sense of the sacredness of marriage came over her, of that partnership of the cares and troubles of life, which love may indeed make more sweet, but for which love is not always needed; which sincere esteem and religious duty can sanctify to the good and the pure.

"Ah!" she thought, "I will never be foolish, never be jealous again: I am his friend, his wife; let him sit by Alice, talk to her, let him even think: 'It would be better to have had her.' I am still the being most near to him: I am still his wife."

CHAPTER XLIV.

BUSINESS.

How did Madame de Launay sprain her ankle? The mystery was never cleared up, but it must have been a severe sprain; Adèle found her groaning on the staircase the next morning, she saw her clinging to the bannisters, and making a wry face that twisted her withered visage into the accurate resemblance of a

German nutcracker, and finally she heard her declare that she was in the greatest agony.

Adèle flew down for assistance; she met her husband, and breathlessly told him the news. He started surprised, then he smiled, and leisurely went up to the sufferer. She shook her head, looked rueful, but finally allowed him to help her downstairs. She entered the Hall limping; Adèle wheeled a couch forward, Madame de Launay sank on it groaning, and her young hostess placing a cushion under the injured limb, said promptly:

"You must not go to-day—no, you must not."

"I cannot," moaned Madame de Launay.

"And Jean must run for Docteur Guillaume," pursued Adèle, warmly.

"Ah, my dear, doctors are all quacks."

"Ah, but Docteur Guillaume is not a quack," said Adèle, eagerly; "not he. Why, it is ten to one that when he sees your foot he will tell you there is nothing the matter with it."

Mr. Osborne bit his lip not to smile, and Madame de Launay said coolly,—

"The very man I want—not for the present—a hurt foot is a joke, but for the future I may be seriously ill. Docteur Guillaume will be invaluable then."

"Pray let me send for him now," insisted Adèle, "pray do." But her guest refused with a smile positive though polite, and her husband kindly patted her cheek, and told her to let Madame de Launay please herself. "What ails them both?" thought Adèle, surprised.

The door opened, in came Mrs. Osborne sympathetic, and Isabella evidently delighted at an accident that would keep the aunt of Auguste in Courcelles.

"You cannot go," said Mrs. Osborne.

Madame de Launay confessed that she could not. Sunshine and fair weather beamed on the face of Isabella, but clouds returned to it, when, after breakfast, Monsieur de Launay rose and took his leave. Important business called him twenty leagues off. Isabella gave her future aunt an angry look, and Mr Osborne smiled over his tea, which, as usual, he drank slowly, and seemed very much amused.

Very bad was Madame de Launay's foot for three days. She was able, however, to leave her room for the saloon, both being on the same floor, and here Mrs. Osborne devotedly kept her company in the daytime; in the evening Mr. Osborne had quiet talks with the aunt of his future partner, who knitted assiduously the

while. Who would have suspected that these three days were one long and continuous battle between the sick lady and the Osbornes.

Yet thus it was, and truly Mrs. Osborne had found her match, and more that her match. Indefatigable, sudden, treacherous, were the attacks she had to parry from morning till night. Sometimes Madame de Launay was slow, methodical, in her tactics, like any old routine commander, but no sooner had Mrs. Osborne entered into the peculiar spirit of this warfare, than Madame de Launay was on her in masses, like a fiery young Bonaparte rushing down from the Alps on the Lombard plain, and scornfully defeating, without regard to rule or precept, the grey-bearded generals of another age. Perfidious in the extreme were her first attacks; she was very much afraid that Isabella's temper was none of the best; she doubted if she would be so able to restrain it as Mrs. Osborne supposed, she was getting old and infirm, and needed rest; and when she had lured Isabella's mother into excusing her daughter's petulance, into the most tender and flattering assurances that she, Madame de Launay, was in all the vigour of her years, and perfectly able to guide her family and rule a warmhearted though somewhat wayward girl, when, we say, Mrs. Osborne had been led thus far, and was all intent on self-defence, her antagonist suddenly put on a serious face, took off her spectacles, and laying by her knitting, informed her that there was a sad fact her conscience would not allow her to conceal from the mother of Isabella. The father of Auguste had been subject to epileptic fits.

"But epilepsy is not hereditary," exclaimed Mrs. Osborne.

"Is it not?" asked Madame de Launay, with much naïveté.

"Not at all; besides, we can get medical opinion, you know."

"Ah, I see!" said Madame de Launay; "I understand, it is not like madness, for instance."

"Oh, dear, no! insanity is decidedly hereditary. Fits are quite another thing."

Madame de Launay resumed her knitting, much relieved; but her conscience took another qualm the next day, and would not allow her to conceal from Mrs. Osborne that the father of Auguste had been locked up for six months in a private lunatic asylum. But it was a profound secret, which no one was to know, and of which Auguste was wholly ignorant. "That woman will drive me distracted," internally exclaimed Mrs. Osborne, fairly at her wit's end.

Mr. Osborne, too, had his share of it, though with him Mad-

ame de Launay was rather more cautious, and wholly business-like. Still she kept him on the alert, and for three days left him but little rest. Every evening the American matter found some new successor, which he had the vexing and wearisome task of destroying; first by facts, then by reasoning.

"How much trouble I give you," benevolently said Madame de Launay, looking up at him from her knitting, and over the gold rim of her spectacles, "but you see I am so anxious for this partnership, that I bring forward every objection I can think of, so that none will remain when it does take place."

Adèle stood at some little distance from the pair; she could see both the raised face of the aged lady and the bent look of her husband; she saw him smile in a peculiar fashion, as he replied—

"Madame, your anxiety equals mine; I desire this matter of the partnership more than you do."

"Of course, of course," she nodded. "By-the-way, how is that matter of Smithson to be settled? You know what I mean."

He knew it but too well; he frowned and bit his lip; Madame de Launay had kept for the last the most vexing and wearisome question; but he controlled himself, and merely replied that he had not thought of that, but that he would see to it.

"Ay, pray do," said Madame de Launay, again knitting rapidly.

Mr. Osborne and his wife were then alone with their guest. He looked at Adèle in a way she knew how to understand. As soon as Mrs. Osborne entered the room, she left it and went to his study; in a few minutes he followed her.

"I am making a clerk of you," he said, as he sat down by her, "but it will not be for long."

"You know very well that from the first I had a vocation that way," said Adèle, smiling; "you know very well that I always have wanted to be your clerk."

"You surely have had your wish for the last three days."

"And I have never spent three such happy days," thought Adèle, for with the absence of Alice jealousy had vanished, and calm, happy love, the love that is simply pleased, even with the silent, careless presence of the loved one, had alone remained behind. Adèle had strong feelings, and jealousy could sting her into the passion of woman; but remove that torment, and though married, though fond, she was still a girl, and girlish innocence kept her heart calm and pure. She was natural, too, and allowed herself to be happy without perplexing herself to know how or why this happiness had come. Sufficient delight it now was to

her to have her husband all her own—to sit by him, work with him, hear him when he spoke, and look at him when she pleased. She really did not wish for more. The calm, even kindness of his manner was to her the fulness of earthly content.

Assiduously, and without looking up, she now accomplished the task her husband had set for her. When it was finished, he said—

“I think we may rest now;” for he, too, had been busy.

Adèle looked up at him; he was pale and tired.

“Ah, you are killing yourself!” she cried. “How will all this end?”

“Truly a comprehensive question.”

“I detest Madame de Launay!” exclaimed Adèle, reddening.

Her husband laughed disdainfully.

“What for, child? She is a clever woman; but she will find, and to her cost, that sincerity would have been the better policy. Truly she will rue the day when she trifled with me.”

Adèle looked at him uneasily. “Is he vindictive or resentful?” she thought. He caught her look, and seemed amused, and answered it—

“I remember the wrong I forgive,” he said.

Adèle reddened and looked disturbed.

“Ah, but you will have a short memory for my transgressions,” she said. “I am your wife, you know, and always to be forgiven.”

Mr. Osborne was absent, but he was not so unobservant or so blind as not to have perceived how great a change had taken place in his wife. The fitful ardour of their early married days had vanished. She did not adore him half so much; but he thought—and he was not mistaken—that she loved him infinitely more. He had for the last three days been watching her closely, and everything he saw had led him to one irresistible conclusion.

For the last three days Adèle had been sweet as honey, and soft as a spring day—veiled, indeed, with light mists, but mild and delightful. Pensive without sadness she moved about the house with dreamy eyes and an absent smile, spoke only when spoken to, but looked gently on every one save her husband; his fixed look she rather shunned, yet without embarrassment or affectation. She avoided it indeed, but with the modest pride of one who will be examined too closely by none. In short, Mr. Osborne saw very plainly that the sad, melancholy wife who had replaced the merry and daring maiden had vanished, and that he had a third Adèle now, gentle, grave, and thoughtful, with slow

movements, little speech, and mien of calm content, a new woman whom he had not known before.

But he let her be what she pleased, and as she pleased; and though he now looked down at her rather kindly, his only reply to her question was—

“Do you mean to be so very naughty that you warn me beforehand to forgive you?”

“Oh, no,” she said, with some warmth.

The appearance of Jean bringing in a letter interrupted the discourse. Mr. Osborne broke the seal, and read the letter with a clouded brow.

A new vexation, a new annoyance had come to him—a call for money, which he could answer, indeed, but which was worded in terms of insolent mistrust that offended him none the less for proceeding from Monsieur Mazois. “What!” he thought, with some bitterness, “is my downfall so certain that I must needs get the ass’s kick?”

He rose, walked about the room, and turning round, found himself facing his wife. She had passed her arm within his, and clasped her two hands upon it.

“What ails you?” she asked, looking up at him earnestly.

“It is only a letter from Monsieur Mazois,” he replied carelessly. For though he availed himself of her services, Mr. Osborne told his wife nothing of his affairs.

“No, no, that is not it,” she said, “that is not what I mean. What ails you of late? What is going to happen? and why do you tell me nothing? You have secrets, close secrets from me? I see there is a war between you and those De Launays; I see you have some end in view which they know not, but you tell me nothing. You are not a statesman; these are not the matters of a nation that I should be kept ignorant. You told me once that all which was yours was also mine; and yet you have cares and troubles you will not let me share. You do not trust in me.”

“Who would trust in such an April creature?” he replied; “you are not two days alike.”

She laughed and looked conscious.

“Yes, I am seventeen,” she said, “and it is the month of April with me still. And are there two days alike in the month of April?”

“Well, April is very sweet,” half sighed Mr. Osborne.

“Yes, but you are not telling me your secrets,” she said, petulantly.

He smiled and told her a story.

"There was once a celebrated Italian teacher of law, named Andrea; he had a pretty, learned daughter, Novella, who occasionally took his chair and supplied his place; but lest the pupils should forget law in looking at his daughter, he had a curtain put up; behind this she spoke and taught. Apply the moral."

Adèle turned red, and looked indignant.

"And so," she said, "you make pretty speeches; you laugh at me, and you will not confide in me."

Mr. Osborne's face darkened. He dropped the hand of his wife, which he was holding, and he said, emphatically—

"Man's confidence is born of woman's love."

Adèle looked up at him.

"Do you mean to say I do not like you?" she asked, with some vehemence.

He could not say it; he knew well enough that he had at length prevailed over this wilful little girl—that they had changed parts. It was not she who now blest her lover; it was he who could dispense and withhold happiness. He smiled a little triumphantly.

"I dare say you like me a little," he said.

"A little," she echoed, "a little."

But he soon soothed her; he was sure, he said, that she adored him; he promised to tell her every thing; he gave her unlimited power of questioning; but he must first go and answer M. Mazois's letter. Would he be long away? she asked.

"Half an hour."

"Shall I wait for you here?"

"Yes. Are you curious Adèle?"

"Curious! you call that curiosity?"

She looked pained and irritated; but a kind smile, a few kind and remonstrative words, again pacified her down into happy gentleness. She made him promise once more not to stay long away, then she let him go.

The afternoon was clear and fine; Mr. Osborne lit a cigar and walked rapidly through the garden on to the counting-house. He had always been fond of his wife, and now it seemed she was fond enough of him. He loved her too much not to feel happy, and he was too much of a man not to be glad.

Monsieur Mazois and his account were well nigh forgotten by the time he reached the counting-house. He opened the door abruptly, then paused amazed on the threshold. Before him in the centre of the room, Monsieur de Launay and Monsieur Morel stood face to face, and at bay: the one small, spiteful, and strong

in his very spite; the other weak and foolish, spite his size and evident wrath.

"Marry her if you dare!" said the foreman, with a grin that showed all his teeth; "marry her if you dare!"

Monsieur de Launay seemed pale with fury; his fair, smooth, florid aspect was strangely discomposed; his very hair looked disturbed.

"Bless me," said Mr. Osborne, very coolly, "I thought you twenty leagues off, Monsieur de Launay."

Monsieur de Launay looked confounded, and could not reply. Monsieur Morel resumed his seat, took up his pen, and left him both excuse and explanation.

"Madame de Launay's foot is as bad as ever," pursued Mr. Osborne, "but perhaps you have already seen your aunt."

"I come from the house," replied the Baron, recovering at length; "I wished to speak to you. I bring news important and confidential."

"We will take a turn outside," said Mr. Osborne, "up the stream; it is a pretty wild place. Please to see to this matter, Monsieur Morel;" he tossed Monsieur Mazois's letter on the table, and followed out the Baron who had already left the counting-house.

The two gentlemen went up the stony banks of the wild gurgling little river, that rushing down from the mountain like a torrent, soon vanished in the lake, first feeding on its way the noisy wheels of Mr. Osborne's forge. Mr. Osborne gave the spot a keen look, searching and attentive.

"We are quite alone," said the Baron.

"Oh! quite: I was not thinking of that. Pray speak." He took out another cigar and offered one to his future partner. Monsieur de Launay took and twirled it between a hesitating finger and thumb, but did not use it.

"I came to tell you of the new turn this Smithson affair is taking," he said; "my aunt has mentioned it already, I believe."

"She has; but pray go on."

Monsieur de Launay did go on. He took some pains to unfold the Smithson affair in all its windings. It was calculated to embarrass Mr. Osborne; but it had not much to do with him in reality. We need not discuss it here. They walked up and down the stream the whole time; at length Monsieur de Launay ceased.

Silence followed; not one word did Mr. Osborne say. Monsieur de Launay gave him a surprised look; he answered it, smiling.

"You are no smoker," he said.

Monsieur de Launay said, rather stiffly, that he had been too intent on explaining that important matter to Mr. Osborne, to smoke.

"And I, to say the truth, was too intent on other thoughts to give your discourse undivided attention. You do not suppose, Monsieur de Launay," he added, looking firmly in his face, "that I am going to feign ignorance or deafness with regard to what I have just heard: My foreman daring you to marry my sister! And you, strange to say, unable to resist the threat."

Monsieur de Launay bit his lip.

Mr. Osborne resumed.

"The source and the secret of his power I ask not. All I have to say is this: over me he has no influence. So far as I am concerned, you may set his threats at defiance; I am going to part from him. I have done with him as I have done with this," he added, casting on the water the end of his cigar; "he is to me as useless and as worthless too. I kept him, spite his treasons, because he is marvellously intelligent, and in a certain way honest; but now I need him not; let him go. I give you this warning, because it were a pity such a rascal should be allowed a moment's impunity. The advice is disinterested. I need not tell you our partnership is still a very remote matter, and consequently your marriage with my sister."

"Monsieur Osborne," asked the Baron de Launay, in tones of ice, "may I ask if you mean to cast a doubt on my honourable desire of keeping my word?"

"By no means," replied Mr. Osborne, smiling, "how could I entertain an idea so wild and improbable, especially after the trouble you have taken in this Smithson matter."

"I am glad to hear you say so," said Monsieur de Launay, ignoring the irony of the tone and accepting the words in their literal meaning. "With regard to that man's insolence, all I have to say is this: He is in possession of a secret, which for the sake of a third person I would not have revealed. He has not and never could have any other power over me."

They stood near the counting-house; Mr. Osborne evidently intended to turn in; Monsieur de Launay bowed coldly to him, and walking over the bridge, re-entered the garden.

Monsieur Morel's task was finished when his patron re-entered the counting-house. He silently handed to Mr. Osborne the account of Monsieur Mazois, in which he had detected an error of some importance, and hoped "Monsieur was satisfied."

"Indeed I am. Monsieur Mazois's mistake, which, by-the-way, is all to his own advantage, I should not have perceived. I am obliged to you, Monsieur Morel."

Monsieur Morel was happy to think he had been the means, however humble, of obliging Monsieur.

"And yet I have too much faith in your penetration to think you will be greatly surprised at the intimation I now give you," resumed Mr. Osborne. "We must part, Monsieur Morel."

A red round spot rose to Monsieur Morel's sallow cheek.

"I have displeased Monsieur," he said.

"You have! You meddle too much. You meddle beyond your province in business matters; you meddle in my private affairs too. My sister has received from you knowledge I had withheld from her purposely. This is not to be borne. I regret the loss of your services; but I must dispense with them."

"Has Monsieur nothing else to urge?" asked the foreman, firmly.

"I could urge until to-morrow morning, if I chose. I could urge that you were in a conspiracy with my brother, and that I defeated you both; I could urge that you read my private books at night, and leave the mark of your wax tapers on the page. I could urge finally that you are a traitor full of insolence and ambition, a traitor to the De Launays with whom you are in league, and whom you do not wish to serve, a traitor to me, whom you cannot deceive. I could urge all this, Monsieur Morel, and I urge nothing, save that it is my pleasure that you should leave, and that I need you no more."

Monsieur Morel had turned rather pale. But his look was steady, and in a clear, calm voice, he said:

"What has Monsieur to urge against me in money matters?"

"Nothing. There, I confess, you are immaculate."

Monsieur Morel bowed.

"I am satisfied," he replied. "I have been slandered, and Monsieur has been listening to slanderers, but Monsieur cannot say that he ever found my accounts wrong. I am satisfied."

"Then you are easily satisfied," said Mr. Osborne, smiling; "but it is not worth discussing." He took up Monsieur Mazois's account and walked out.

Externally Mr. Osborne had remained cool as ice; but internally his blood was boiling. He knew well enough what Monsieur Morel had been aiming at: no less than partnership with him, than marriage with Isabella. The folly of the ambition did not take away from its insolence. "He could think it, he could

dare to think it," muttered Mr. Osborne, as he walked along the garden. "Dare to think it!" Ay, that he could, and he had dared to think of Mr. Osborne's wife too, and resting his claims on the indubitable fact, that he was a man, he would have dared to think of a princess had any royal lady fallen in his way. No woman was too beautiful, no lady was too high for Monsieur Morel.

"Good evening," said a gentle voice. Mr. Osborne looked up; his rigid face relaxed; Alice stood before him. "You see," said Madame Lascours, "that I kept my word. The three days are out and here I am."

"And what news do you bring?" asked Mr. Osborne, with some anxiety.

"Failure, failure," she said, smiling.

He looked mortified and surprised. He had exerted himself strenuously to bring the relatives of Monsieur Lascours to a further recognition of his widow's rights, and he had failed; but he would not be discouraged.

"We must try what we can do in Paris," he said, cheerfully.

"Pray give it up," she replied, a little despondently.

"Indeed I will not. Pray sit down here with me for a few moments, and I will explain myself more fully. I would not press the matter on you now; but that it must be attended to at once."

She yielded; they sat down on a bench in one of the many shallow arbours that dented the hedge of the broad alley. Rapidly, though forcibly, he urged a new course of action.

"You have tried fair means," he said, "and you have failed. The law is your only remedy."

"The law!" she said, with a start; "the law! I have no means."

"You have right and truth; and as to the means! why leave them to me."

"No, no, I cannot—indeed, I cannot," she said, nervously. Mr. Osborne took her hand and looked gravely in her face.

"By the memory of a past we neither of us can forget," he said; "I entreat you to do me that favour."

"Monsieur Osborne," said Alice, very sadly, "you wrong yourself. I know you think that I owe my sorrows to you. I repeat it, you are mistaken. With my own hand have I dealt out my own griefs; every blessing I ever enjoyed came to me from a stranger."

"But you consent!" he urged.

"I shall think about it," she replied, rising. "Where is Adèle? I have not seen her yet."

"She is in my study. She will be happy to see you again."

He took her arm; they walked up the broad alley and soon reached the Manor. They ascended the steps that led to the study; they entered the apartment which the declining sun filled with a warm, vivid glow, but Adèle was not there.

"She got tired of waiting," observed Mr. Osborne. He walked back to the balcony that overlooked the garden; he cast a keen, searching look over all its alleys, enclosed in boxwood hedge, but he only saw Lilian chasing her hoop before her in one of the gravelled paths. To see Lilian was to be pretty sure that Adèle was not very far away.

"Where is your mamma?" at once said Mr. Osborne.

Lilian looked up and parted the heavy hair from her forehead.

"Mamma is in the Maze," she said.

"In the Maze! and what is she doing there, reading?"

"She is crying," replied Lilian, and once more she pursued her hoop.

Mr. Osborne and Alice, who had come forward, exchanged rapid looks. He bit his lip; she seemed confounded.

"Isabella has been tormenting her again," he said; "and she, like a foolish child, has let herself be tormented. Excuse me for a while."

He rapidly descended the stone steps and crossed the garden. Half-way to the Maze he met Isabella walking briskly, like one who has been somewhere and is returning. Her brother's face darkened. He stopped short before her and looked severe.

"You have been to the counting-house?" he said.

Isabella gave a start and reddened too, but she did not deny.

"You have been to the counting-house," he said again, more severely. "I am displeased with you, Isabella. You have made Monsieur Morel give you improper information; but do you know what price you have paid for it? He has given you a place in his thoughts. I tell you this on purpose. Let the mortification be a warning to prudence in future. You are not, I fear, Isabella, a very prudent woman."

Isabella drew herself up and looked three inches taller.

"I am obliged to you for the lecture," she said, haughtily.

"I have not done," pursued Mr. Osborne. "I need not remind you how you interfered once between my wife and me. You

promised not to offend so again. How is it that you have broken your word this very day?"

"I do not know what you mean," said Miss Osborne, frigidly; "I saw your wife to-day, but I do not think I opened my lips to her. I suppose she has relapsed into melancholy; but you surely, with your penetration, cannot be ignorant of what ails her."

"And pray what ails her?" said Mr. Osborne, struck with his sister's tone.

Isabella smiled disdainfully.

"You do not suppose," she said, "that I am going to draw down on myself the wrath of Adèle, as I once drew down the wrath of her husband?—No, no, I shall not interfere between married people in a hurry."

She gathered up her sweeping skirts and walked away. Mr. Osborne went on to the Maze. Adèle was still there; her tears had ceased, but she stood rigid and pale, leaning against the pedestal of the statue of Silence, with her cheek on her hand and her eyes bent on the earth. Her husband went up to her, and passed his arm around her.

"Adèle, what ails you?" he asked.

"Nothing," she replied listlessly.

"I was delayed by Monsieur de Launay," he said; "Madame Lascours, too, has come back; she wishes to see you."

Adèle neither moved nor spoke.

"What ails you?" he asked again with tender entreaty.

"Nothing," she said, impatiently. She turned her face away, and looked both haughty and defiant. He bit his lip.

Was this the girl who barely an hour before had looked up at him soft as the dew of the morning which the scorching sun has not yet drunk up, who had looked up at him with something so like modest love in her eyes, that if it were not that, he knew not what it could be? "There is no understanding her," he thought, with an impatient sigh. "Ah, have I not cares, not troubles enough, but she must add to them?" And angrily, yet with a sort of tenderness in all his anger, he took her in his arms, and he said—

"Adèle, this is too much; you trifle with me as you should trifle with no man, least of all with a husband. You love me, yet—"

"I—I!" she interrupted, trembling and indignant. "You can say that!"

"And can you deny it?" he asked, amazed and angry at such strange caprice.

"You taunt me—you taunt me with it!"

She clasped her hands together with a sort of despair; then she broke from him like a wild thing, and darting down the windings of the Maze, she vanished.

Mr. Osborne stood where she had left him, pale and wrathful. It was indeed too much. His love was cooling; his patience was exhausted; he did not even think of what ailed his wife; he simply thought it would be very strange indeed if he gave her the opportunity of trifling thus with him again.

CHAPTER XLV.

MÉRIGNY.

"I wish you would look a little more pleasant either of you," said Anna, looking from Isabella to Adèle, who were both sitting with her in her room, Isabella imperially leaning back in her chair, Adèle with her arm resting on the corner of the mantel-piece, and her head on her arm, like a young Meditation.

"Pleasant!" echoed Isabella, yawning, "why, I am sick of my life—sick of my future aunt especially. What an evening we had of it last night.—Ma and Talleyrand at chess, I doing nothing, William looking at Madame Lascours."

Anna coughed.

"Pooh!" superbly said Isabella, "you need not cough! Adèle knows William admires Alice."

"Not more than I do," said Adèle, without changing her attitude.

"Granted; but he looks at her more than you do. Well, it is monotonous to have but one man who has eyes, ears, and speech but for one woman."

"I wish you would not!" said Anna, uneasily.

Adèle looked up with some pride.

"Both William and I love and admire Alice," she said. She rose and left the room.

She went down to the garden. Sunny and warm was the morning; but the time when Adèle rejoiced with youthful delight in sunshine and heat had fled. She looked at the sky, and she saw it not—at the lake, and it was a sheet of water that had no

meaning; the bright flowers on their stems, the invisible birds singing sweetly in the boughs of trees told her no enchanting story of beauty, love, and joy. Alas! the once careless girl was now a careworn woman who moved in a burning dream, haunted by two spectres—Jealousy and Love. She sat down on a bench, and opened the book which she had brought with her, and which, as usual, her fixed eyes saw, but did not read; and wrapt in her own thoughts, she was not conscious that her husband stood looking at her with a sad and severe face. She did not see him until he silently sat down by her side; then with a start she raised her eyes and gave him a timid and doubtful look.

Her inexplicable caprices seemed to have wearied Mr. Osborne's patience; her want of openness seemed to have alienated his affection. He called her no more to his study; as much as he could he avoided her; he rarely spoke to her; he never looked at her; and sad fact, of which Adèle was keenly conscious, when they met or remained alone, an annoyed constrained meaning passed over his face, and altered its sweet and benignant expression to something which her aching heart construed, though wrongly, into aversion. Hesitatingly she now looked up at him. What could make him sit thus by her? Somewhat abruptly, he said—

"Docteur Guillaume recommends MÉRIGNY; are you willing to go?"

MÉRIGNY was a little watering-place some twenty miles off, to which Docteur Guillaume was rather noted for sending troublesome patients. He had got tired of Madame Osborne's incomprehensible illness, and advised her husband to send her there. The book of Adèle dropped on her lap; she clasped her trembling hands above it, but she said calmly enough,—

"Oh, yes; I am willing."

She looked wretched. Mr. Osborne bit his lip; his brow darkened, but he controlled himself, and observed,—

"If, at the end of a month, the waters have done you no good, we can come back here and"—he paused: a burning blush had suffused the face of his wife; she reddened to her very hair; her eyes beamed with pleasure; her lips parted into a happy smile; she let her book slip from her lap to the earth, and clasping her hands on his arm, she said, softly,—

"You are coming with me?"

"Yes; Madame Lascours cannot accompany you."

Adèle started to her feet and clapped her hands.

"God bless that pearl of doctors," she cried; "when are we going? To-day—now?"

"To-morrow."

"And why not to-day?"

"Because it is impossible."

"Ah! if you wished for it as much as I do," she cried, ardently, "we should go this moment. Well, where are you going?" she added, chagrined to see him rise.

"To the counting-house."

Her brow cleared; she passed her arms within his, and walked with him to the end of the garden. She talked the whole of the way; she gathered flowers and threw them away in the lightness of her heart; she laughed, she sang snatches of songs in Patois; she seemed beside herself with joy.

"A new fit of amiability," thought Mr. Osborne, taking it very coolly, yet he could not help observing, as they parted,—

"You are an incomprehensible little girl."

Adèle laughed saucily in his face, and thought, as she ran away gaily along the alleys, "Ah! but I understand myself though." She certainly did, and, for the moment, she was perfectly happy; her joy, like her grief, ever ran into extremes; moderation is unknown to youth; her jealousy was gone; her husband was taking her away from the scene of her torment; for her society he was relinquishing the sight and presence of Alice; grief was a folly, and life was a delight.

This blissful mood lasted, until entering the conservatory, she found Madame Lascours there. Unconscious of the joy she was blighting, Alice told her calmly that she was going to Paris the next day, that she would stay a week, then join her and Mr. Osborne at Mèrigny. Adèle looked moody; the ardour of her joy fled; Mèrigny lost its charms; it was a place like another, it was no more a demi-paradise.

"But why do you not come at once with us? What can you want to go to Paris for?" asked Adèle, a little ironically.

Madame Lascours felt and looked surprised to find Adèle so ignorant of a matter which she had placed entirely in Mr. Osborne's hands.

"You know what I went to Lyons for," she observed.

"I know nothing, Alice. Tell me nothing, he might not like it."

"But I can tell you my own affairs, child. You know that to your husband's kind interference I owe the little provision I have. He thought it insufficient, and asked for more; the reply was a

withdrawal of that provision, such as it is. I went to Lyons to appeal to the cousins of my late husband, and I failed. Monsieur Osborne urges law proceedings, previous to which I must go to Paris and see the other heirs; it is a vexatious business, of which he takes on himself all the burden and the toil."

Adèle smiled rather oddly, "He is so good," she said.

Mr. Osborne did not leave the counting-house until the dinner bell rang. As he entered the Manor, and approached the door of the dining-room, he heard the clear, free laugh of Isabella. "De Launay is come," he thought. A cloud passed over his face; Monsieur de Launay's previous visit had been a mere flying call, but Madame de Launay's foot had been progressing; he now probably came with more serious intentions. His presence recalled Mr. Osborne to vexatious cares he had for a while laid aside, but he smoothed his aspect and entered the apartment.

Monsieur de Launay was even unusually cordial to his future partner, just as he was even unusually attentive to his future bride: in high spirits he seemed, but Mr. Osborne watched him closely, and he could see that under that fair show Monsieur de Launay was ill at ease.

"He is come to take me away," said Madame de Launay; "to-morrow shall rid you of your sore-footed guest."

Isabella being in an excellent temper, was amiable and gracious. She went and sat by the aunt of her betrothed, and said with some cordiality,—

"And why should you go? why not stay another week with us until you are well—quite well?"

"My opinion quite," said the Baron.

His aunt looked at Isabella over her gold spectacles, and gently patted Miss Osborne's blooming cheek.

"I cannot stay," she said, "but I can take you away for a week; shall I?"

Isabella reddened and laughed.

"A decided improvement on the original plan," cried Monsieur de Launay, looking at Mrs. Osborne, who looked at her stepson.

"Why not?" he said ironically.

The entrance of Alice and Adèle interrupted the discourse. Dinner began.

Mr. Osborne saw without much surprise that the sunshine had all vanished from the face of his wife. "Of course," he thought; but he was vexed and concerned to perceive that she scarcely eat. She smiled when Alice stooped and whispered a remonstrance; she accepted everything the Baron helped her to, but the food re-

remained untouched on her plate. Dinner was over; Mrs. Osborne took the arm of Adèle in order that Auguste might remain to Isabella, and that Isabella might remain amiable. She led her to the drawing-room, whither the company had all adjourned, whispering confidential murmurs the whole way. When Isabella and her betrothed were fairly together, Mrs. Osborne dropped her daughter-in-law.

At once Mr. Osborne went up to Adèle, and standing by her as she leaned against the mantelpiece, and idly handled an Indian fire-screen of delicate ivory, he said,—

“I am sorry to tell you that owing to Monsieur de Launay’s arrival, I cannot accompany you to Mèrigny to-morrow.”

“Do you regret it?” she asked, with a smile, of which he felt, though he could not understand the irony.

He gave her a displeased look and walked away. Truly, his wife was something more than incomprehensible. He took no further notice of her, but went and sat by Alice. He looked up at her face with a fixedness of which he was unconscious. Its unchangeable beauty, which no cloud of temper ever darkened, seemed to sink into his very heart. “Would to Heaven that I had married her eight years ago,” he thought, with some passion, and a vision of calm, heavenly peace, of the serene joys a beautiful and good woman can give to man, came to him with dangerous power; with dangerous regret he dwelt on those eight years which he might have had, and which Alice had given to an old man whose very fondness was tormenting and suspicious; with dangerous pleasure his look lingered on that lovely countenance, until the surprised glance and rapid blush of Madame Lascours recalled him to himself, and reminded him that what might have been was not, that Alice was nothing to him, nothing but the friend of his wife, of his wife whom he had for a moment forgotten. A little moodily he looked up at her. She still stood as he had left her, by the mantelpiece, playing with the ivory screen, her back was turned towards him, her averted look shunned his. With his usual composure Mr. Osborne turned to Madame Lascours, and spoke to her of the business that was taking her to Paris.

Alas! Adèle had seen and divined all. The mirror above the mantelpiece reflected the whole room: it was clear and deep, and but too faithful. She saw her husband look at her friend as he should have looked at none save her; for his look expressed something beyond that impartial admiration of beauty which can never offend: it expressed in language, but too plain, emotion, tenderness, regret, blending with the unavailing desire of impossible

happiness. With eager eyes that seemed as if they could not see too much, with lips parched and parted, she looked and drank deep draughts of bitter and jealous sorrow. She looked and she saw the blush of Alice wakening him from the contemplation, she saw the glance of secret resentment he cast at her—and dreading, though low, she laughed at herself, at the promises of life, at the love of a man's heart.

Unhappy child! She did not know that her own folly was working fast her own undoing; that the suffering woman was expiating the wayward wilfulness of the wild and rebellious girl.

Mr. Osborne had not long been sitting by Alice, when he rose again, and went to his wife.

"Madame Lascours has been mentioning some facts to me," he said, "which make me think it more advisable for me not to go to M^érigny, with you.—Do you object to go with Mrs. Osborne?"

"Oh! no!" said Adèle, apathetically, "it makes no difference."

"I dare say not," thought Mr. Osborne, with a bitter smile; but he merely observed:

"From a few words which she dropped at dinner, I know that Mrs. Osborne will be glad enough to go. Still," he added, lowering his voice, "if you object to her for your companion—"

"I do not," interrupted Adèle; "stay by all means, if business keeps you here."

"Oh! I shall go and see you several times a week at least," he said.

"Do not put yourself out to come to me," observed his wife; "I know you have plenty to occupy you here."

"Incorrigible?" said Mr. Osborne, with gentle reproach.

She returned his look with one of sad defiance, that seemed to say, "you cannot read me, do what you will."

"Tell me again that you do not object going to M^érigny with Mrs. Osborne."

"I do not."

He left her, and being desirous to conclude this matter at once he went up to his stepmother, and made the proposal.

Whilst he sat by her talking, Alice rose and came up to Adèle.

"What ails you?" she asked; "are you ill? Why are you so pale? Ah! M^érigny must give you another look than that."

"When do you go to Paris?" asked Adèle.

"I do not go; I stay here, Monsieur Osborne—"

The approach of Mrs. Osborne, bland and sweet, interrupted her.

"That Mèrigny plan is delightful!" she exclaimed.

"Enchanting!" said Adèle, mocking at her own misery. He was sending her away; he was staying with Alice.

"The waters work miracles," pursued Mrs. Osborne; "we will bring her back fair as a lily, blooming as a rose," she said to Alice. "Shall we go to-morrow?" she added, patting the cheek of Adèle—its deadly coldness struck her. "She is going into a decline decidedly," thought Mrs. Osborne; but aloud, her prognostications were of the brightest; and again she urged the necessity of prompt departure.—"Say to-morrow after breakfast," observed Mr. Osborne, joining the group.

"After our guests and friends are gone," suggested Mrs. Osborne.

"Precisely! Does the hour suit you, Adèle?" he asked, addressing his wife.

"Oh, yes!" she answered, listlessly.

Mr. Osborne walked away. In a little while he and Madame Lascours were sitting apart, divided by a narrow table covered with papers relating to her affairs. Above it, lit by a lamp which burned there for their own use, Adèle saw their two faces the whole of that evening.

"And so you, too, are running away?" said Madame de Launay, near whom she sat; "Madame Osborne goes with you; Mademoiselle Osborne comes with me. Why, who remains in the house to keep poor Monsieur Osborne company?"

"His sister Anna," gravely and coldly replied Adèle.

No more was said.

Dull and grey was the next morning; but Mrs. Osborne thought it would keep up, and Mr. Osborne confirmed the opinion. There was only one rather awkward matter—Madame de Launay's carriage was not coming, and Mrs. Osborne was all confusion at the idea of leaving that esteemed lady behind. Indeed she informed her dear William that she could not think of going, until the excellent lady to whom she was to confide her darling had departed with that said darling safe under her wing. But a five minutes' conversation with William produced a great change in Mrs. Osborne. Instead of wishing to delay departure, she was all for hastening it. She could not go too soon; there could not be too much despatch. She ran up to the room of Adèle all anxiety.

"My love," she said, "it is a beautiful day. I hope you will remember that ten is the hour. It would be no use waiting for them to go first. Can I do anything to assist you?"

Adèle, who was extremely pale, heard her with apathetic wonder. She calmly replied—

"I am ready, but we must breakfast first."

"I suppose we must," regretfully said Mrs. Osborne. "Well, dear, you will not forget that ten is the hour?"

She left. Adèle remained a little while behind, then went downstairs. She met Jeannette on her way.

"Madame—Madame," moaned the old woman.

Adèle merely raised up her finger warningly, and went down without a word. At the door of the dining-room she found Alice. Madame Lascours gave her an alarmed look,—

"You are pale as death," she said.

"Mérigny will do me good," replied Adèle. She pushed the door open, and entered.

Mr. Osborne, who was talking to his stepmother, turned round and gave his wife a brief look, then resumed his discourse. The Baron paused in his courtship with Isabella, they sat apart, to give the mistress of the house a surprised and concerned gaze. Madame de Launay put down her knitting and shook her head. Adèle sat down by the breakfast-table, and presided over the meal as usual. Mérigny formed the theme of discourse.

"Oh, it is the most horrid little place," said Isabella, "with *crétins*, *gôîtres*, and all kinds of horrors."

Madame de Launay drily observed,—

"I was born in Mérigny."

"Were you really?" said Isabella, not in the least disconcerted; "well, I should not have imagined that."

"There are many things in this world which you would not have imagined," rather tartly observed the old lady.

"I dare say there are," coolly retorted the young one.

Mrs. Osborne felt with alarm a forthcoming battle. She trod on her daughter's toe underneath the table, but, to her confusion, Madame de Launay uttered a scream—

"Oh, Madame, my foot! pray be careful. It is still extremely tender."

Mrs. Osborne overflowed with apologies.

"There is the carriage," said Alice to Adèle.

Every one rose to look at it, save Madame de Launay and Adèle. From the window Mr. Osborne heard the elder lady say to his wife—

"My dear, you have taken no breakfast;" and Adèle answered, in a low tone, "I was not hungry."

It was the carriage.

"My love," said Mrs. Osborne to Adèle, "are you ready?"

Mechanically Adèle rose, and said that she had only to go upstairs and put on her bonnet and cloak, and that she would be down in a few minutes. The door closed upon her; Mrs. Osborne walked up and down the room and seemed lost in thought. Alice stood at the window, looking at Jean helping the coachman to strap the luggage of the two ladies behind the carriage, and Mrs. Osborne made use of the few moments she had to spare to go and bid Anna adieu. She promptly returned bonnetted and shawled, and looking around the room, she saw, with a touch of annoyance she could not quite conceal, that Adèle had not yet come down. But even as she was expressing her apprehension of rain, and her regret at delay, howsoever short, the door opened, and Adèle entered. At once Mrs. Osborne's countenance cleared.

"Right, quite right, my love, we shall be in excellent time, and we shall have a beautiful day."

The adieux began. Mrs. Osborne was gracious to Madame de Launay and Alice, cordial to her stepson, fond to Isabella, and all in five minutes. Adèle was as prompt, though more silent. She held out her cheek to Madame de Launay, gave her hand to Isabella, embraced Alice, with a long, sad look, and finally turned to her husband.

"I shall see you into the carriage," he said, taking her arm within his. The dining-room door closed behind them, and no one followed them out. Mrs. Osborne was already standing on the stone steps of the Manor, talking to the coachman, and impressing upon his mind the necessity of taking the best of the two roads that led to Mèrigny. And Adèle, standing in the gloom of the half-open door, through which she saw the carriage that was to bear her away, the long road that carriage was to take, was parting from her husband. She gave him her hand, she held up her face, but he did not embrace her.

"Good-bye," she said.

But he did not bid her farewell.

"I shall write," she said, "and I dare say you will find a few minutes to answer me."

"Ah! child," he exclaimed, "how have I deserved that you should do me this wrong?"

"But if you have not much time," observed Adèle.

"Am I a tyrant?" he said, with subdued vehemence; "have I ever shown a wish to control you beyond your pleasure?"

Adèle did not reply.

Mrs. Osborne, having by this finished her exhortation to the coachman, turned round, and coughed gently. At once Mr. Osborne left his wife and went up to his stepmother.

"My dear madam," he said, "I am extremely sorry to have put you uselessly to so much trouble. But Adèle cannot go. She is not well."

Mrs. Osborne looked bewildered, then annoyed, and finally sympathising—

"How very unfortunate," she said—"I mean that she should be unwell. My dear child, what is it ails you?" she added, going up to her daughter-in-law, and looking at her with some curiosity.

Adèle did not answer, but averted her face, which was burning red.

"Ah! a headache, I see," promptly said Mrs. Osborne; "the worst of all things."

Still Adèle did not speak. She seemed overwhelmed with confusion and shame. Mr. Osborne, though sorely displeased, pitied her, and to free her from this close and not very friendly scrutiny, he briefly told Jean to dismiss the carriage, and with a shorter apology than his natural courtesy would have dictated, he parted from his stepmother, and taking the arm of Adèle he led her, without a word, to his study. He made her enter first, then he closed the door, and he not merely closed, but he bolted it. He was resolved once for all to have a clear explanation with his wife, and internally he vowed that she should not leave him without a full confession. But there were two doors to the study, and no sooner did Adèle hear him bolting that by which they had entered, than, like a bird, she flew through the door that led to the garden.

CHAPTER XLVI.

PARTNERSHIPS.

SPITE his vexation, Mr. Osborne could not help laughing; but even though he laughed, his brow was dark; his anger against Adèle had reached its extreme point; and it would have been better for her to have braved the breaking of the thunder-cloud than to leave him to brood silently over the insult—for such he held it—which she had offered to him; the more he thought over it,

the more indignant he felt. What! he could not in so simple a thing have the confidence of his wife? She had received with transport the proposal of going to M^{er}igny; she had, with entire acquiescence, submitted to the escort of Mrs. Osborne; she had, and more than once, too, assured him that the change made no difference to her, and after this she had spent the night in a grief of which she thought him unconscious; she had not been able to eat the next morning, and, finally, she had bid him adieu with a look that made him feel he was a tyrant and she was a victim; as if anything would have been more simple and more easy than to say frankly that she would rather stay than go!

"I thought her frank and open as day!" thought Mr. Osborne, bitterly. "Ah, what a delusion! Ah, marriage, what a sad unweaver thou art!"

He sat down, and fell into a bitter reverie; a light sound soon roused him, but he did not look up; he knew well enough it was his wife who stood by his chair.

"No, you shall not be angry with me," said Adèle, "not even one hour. I am come back, you see, of my own accord, to be scolded and forgiven."

She spoke in that soft, girlish voice which had always had a strange charm for his ear, and strange power over his heart. He looked up at her; she stood by his side with childish attitude and childish grace. He passed his arm around her; he drew her on his knee; he pressed her to his heart with the last fervour and the last fondness of a love which he felt—and with woe he felt it—was expiring fast. With fondness, with vehemence, with passion and reproach, he spoke.

"Child," he said, "you try me too much. I am not a God, infallible, ever just, unchangeable. I am a man, frail, erring, subject to a hundred weaknesses; and I tell you that you try me too much. I tell you that I feel with dread the time fast coming when we two shall be as aliens and strangers; when, though one home, one board, one roof should still be ours, we shall be more asunder than is the man of to-day from the woman yet unborn. I tell you that you try me too much; my patience is exhausted, my confidence is outraged, my affection is estranged by caprices so incessant, by conduct so inconsistent, by a bearing so opposed to love as are yours, I tell you that you try me too much."

Adèle did not answer one word—she felt in a dream.

"Come," he said, softening his tone and his look, "have confidence in me once for all; let your husband be your friend; let him understand you, let him make you happy if he can. Do not

treat him as—God help me, that you should compel me to say the word—do not treat him as your enemy ! ”

Adèle smiled, passed her fingers in his dark curls, and looked up in his face.

“ My enemy,” she said, “ you my enemy ! Ah, blessed be the day then when I first saw my enemy ! ”

He was moved to the very heart ; he knew not what to say—he knew not what he felt. Her gentleness made him feel weak as a child ; her looks—modest as the tones, as the looks of a girl, yet fond, spite all she could do—confounded him. If it was not love, what could it be ? He looked down at her, longing to pierce with that gaze, to unravel with the force of his will the secrets of that heart, the web of that mystery. Her eyes were fastened on his very strangely, and very strangely, too, her parted lips smiled.

“ What are you thinking of ? ” he asked.

“ Do not ask me,” she said, in a low, sad tone.

“ But you must tell me ! ” he insisted ; for he thought her answer would be a guiding clue.

“ Do not ask me,” she said again ; but she saw his displeased look ; she hastily added, clinging to him as if fearful lest he should go away, “ well, well, I shall tell you. I was thinking—‘ Ah, what a good thing if I could die now.’ ”

Tears of anger and grief rose to Mr. Osborne’s eyes.

“ Ah, it is too much ! ” he said, rising and putting his wife away, “ it is too much, Adèle ! ”

For he felt that if his wife loved him, such love was too dreary, too tormenting. It was, indeed, a love that would have made him bless indifference.

“ You asked me,” she said, sadly, “ and I answered your question ; why are you angry with me ? ”

He felt the justice of the reproach ; he came back to her ; again he took her in his arms ; again he pressed her to his heart ; again he spoke.

“ Child,” he said, with mingled pathos and sorrow, “ I appeal to you for the last time : tell me what ails you—there is a redeeming virtue in truth ; your words may seem bitter to me now, but I have no doubt that when that is past they will bear good fruit to us both. Does anything that preceded or followed our marriage trouble you ?—Say so—I will make all clear, and time will show you that all can be made happy too. But speak—whatever you do, speak.”

Adèle remained silent. Speak, indeed ? Tell him “ I am in love with you, and I am jealous.” She would have died first.

"For the last time," again said her husband, "I appeal to you. Now is the moment for you—for me—on my word of honour—if you do not answer me now—as I am a man—as I am a gentleman—I will never, come what will, trouble you with a question again."

He spoke without anger, but with the calmness of settled purpose and inexorable will. The heart of Adèle sank within her, but she could not speak, she could not even utter one word. There was a spell on her tongue that charmed her into silence. He waited, and waited vainly. He rose and put her away without anger, without unkindness.

"Very well," he said, "let it be."

But spite of himself, he sighed; the last sweet drop had melted away out of his marriage cup, and only the miserable dregs remained behind. He took his hat and walked out of the room, down the flight of stone steps into the garden, but the voice of his wife called him back. He returned, and found her in tears.

"Oh, do not leave me in unkindness!" she cried.

"I am not leaving you in unkindness," he said, and he waited, evidently expecting that she would speak. She did not.

The door opened, and Mrs. Osborne came in, looking rather frightened.

"William, their carriage has come," she said; "will you speak to Isabella?"

"Yes; send her to me."

"My dear," said Mrs. Osborne, addressing her daughter-in-law, "will you not come and bid the De Launays adieu?"

Adèle rose apathetically. Her husband took her arm and led her to the window; there, lowering his voice and looking full in her face, he said—

"The De Launays are going. When they are gone, you will have something to tell me."

"Nothing," she replied.

"You may alter your mind. I give you until their departure is over to think upon it."

He released her. She left the room with her mother-in-law, and proceeded with that lady, who looked anything but composed or at ease, to the Hall.

Madame de Launay was as brisk as a bee: her nephew looked abstracted; Alice was not present; Isabella was silent and suspicious, and stood apart.

"My dear, William wishes to speak to you," said her mother; "you will find him in the study."

Isabella's colour faded a little, but she merely bent her head apologetically, and walked out of the room.

"Well, but are we, or are we not, to have that fair daughter of yours?" said Madame de Launay; "I mean, are we to take her away or not?"

"The matter rests with her brother," gravely replied Mrs. Osborne.

"I am afraid you are not well," said Monsieur de Launay, bending over the chair of Adèle.

She did not even answer him. She felt cold, listless, and dead.

The door opened, Mr. Osborne and his sister walked in. Had Isabella gazed at the Medusa that she looked so rigid and so stony? She went to the farthest window and sat there. Mr. Osborne went to the mantelpiece, and leaning against it, he looked at Madame de Launay, and said—

"You are going?"

"Immediately," was the brisk reply.

"Then I perceive," he calmly said, "that now must take place an explanation I thought to defer."

Monsieur de Launay took out his handkerchief and raised it to his lips and coughed; Mrs. Osborne looked uneasy; Madame de Launay knit her brow and moved on her chair; Isabella sat by the window rigid as stone, and Adèle looked very earnestly at her husband. "He is going to judge them all," she thought, "and after them he will judge me." He resumed,—

"It is now some months since Monsieur de Launay did me the honour of wishing to enter into a partnership with me. I lent a willing ear to his proposals; there were many reasons why I should. I was beset with difficulties which, with reasonable advantage to himself, he could remove. How and why this partnership, nevertheless, was delayed until it has ceased to be advantageous to him and useful to me, I need not say; we know it. I need but observe that I now once for all decline it."

"I cannot but say that I approve you," put in Madame de Launay, resolved to conclude this matter once for ever.

Her nephew did not venture to open his lips; indeed, he scarcely would have had time to do so, for Mr. Osborne had observed,—

"My chief reason for declining this partnership is one that concerns you too closely for me not to mention it now: I am leaving this business before it leaves me."

Madame de Launay took a pinch of snuff and said—

"Ah! bah!"

No one else spoke. Madame de Launay took a second pinch of snuff, and said—

“And who succeeds you?”

“No one; the house of Osborne and Cie. expires with me.”

And there is no denying that, as he said it, Mr. Osborne looked with ironical pleasure at Madame de Launay. She looked and she was confounded. That Mr. Osborne should die slowly, giving her time to withdraw safely from the connection, was only a matter of course in the way of business: that he should withdraw suddenly, with the rare wisdom of not grasping like a drowning man at every plank of safety, was to Madame de Launay like the unexpected loss of a limb. She made a wry face, and gave Mr. Osborne anything but a kind look; but she could not exactly say: “Why did you not ruin yourself to serve me?” She took a third pinch of snuff, and observed:

“You are a wise man, Monsieur Osborne;” and taking off her spectacles and putting them on again, she added, emphatically: “You are a wise man.”

Mr. Osborne bowed and smiled; there is no denying that the praise of his enemy gratified him. He resumed:

“There is another delicate question connected with this partnership: My sister has informed me, that even as I decline the partnership so must she decline the honour of Monsieur de Launay’s hand. Her reasons are so obvious that I need not mention them; so excellent that I hope no attempt to combat them will be made.”

No such attempt was made by Madame de Launay. She merely pinched up her lips and shut her eyes; her nephew went up to the window and leaned against it, visibly affected. Then taking a sudden resolve, he crossed over to Isabella, who sat in the other window; and though she neither moved nor looked at him, he said, with great earnestness:

“Mademoiselle Osborne, this is impossible—I will not—after all that has past—I will not believe it, unless I hear it from your own lips.”

Isabella rose and stood before him. “My brother has said the truth,” she said.

“Oh! I cannot believe that this resolve sprang from you,” he persisted.

With something between grace and dignity Isabella resumed:

“Monsieur de Launay, I will not do my judgment the wrong of saying that I have altered that opinion of you which I expressed by the consent I now withdraw. I will say but this: I can-

not and I will not enter a family where I cannot bring as much as I receive." She bent her head, and left the room.

Monsieur de Launay looked so moved, that at once his aunt rose.

"Be it so," she said; "I admire Mademoiselle Osborne's spirit, and I approve it."

All was over. Mrs. Osborne, who had hoped to the last, vainly looked at her stepson. No sign of relenting appeared on his face; no attempt at reconciliation passed his lips.

"Auguste, give me your arm," said Madame de Launay. "Au revoir, Madame Osborne. Good-bye, my dear; I hope M^rigny will do you good yet. Thank you, Monsieur Osborne, I do not want your arm. My foot is wonderfully well."

Mr. Osborne had no doubt it was; but persisted, nevertheless, in seeing his guests into their carriage. Monsieur de Launay handed his aunt in; he was so disturbed that he had quite forgotten to bid either Mrs. Osborne or Adèle adieu, then bowing coldly to his ex-partner and ex-brother-in-law, he too entered the carriage; Jean closed the door; the coachman cracked his whip; the carriage rattled down the stony road. The partnership was dissolved; the ambitious dreams of Isabella were over.

And pale and dreary, the disappointed girl stood before her brother as he closed the door, and she descended the staircase.

"Are they gone?" she asked.

"They are."

"The mean, despicable—" tears closed the reproach.

"Do not be too harsh upon him," said Mr. Osborne, calmly; "he likes and admires you, and I doubt, Isabella, if you ever liked or admired him."

Isabella looked full of scorn.

"I admire him, indeed! I never did. But you mistake, William. Monsieur de Launay's taste was too correct to admire so unworthy an object as Isabella Osborne, whilst there was a so much more perfect object in the way."

"I suppose you mean Madame Lascours," he observed, coldly.

She gave him an ironical look, and turned away without a word.

Mr. Osborne entered the Hall as his stepmother was leaving it. Adèle was sitting in the same spot and in the same attitude. Her husband went and sat by her. He looked at her silently. She made an effort to speak.

"Is it true," she said. "Are you really giving up that business, that was wearing you to death?"

"I am, indeed."

She threw her arms around his neck.

"Thank God," she said, "I am glad, I am—indeed I am. But are you sure it is all over?"

"I am quite sure. The task I undertook a year ago at my father's will is over. It has brought me a world of cares, sleepless nights, anxious days, the treachery of a brother, the dishonesty of a servant, the bitterness of a whole family, and given me but one doubtful blessing, that slipped in unawares." Adèle gave him a wistful and agitated look. "It has left me," continued Mr. Osborne, "poorer in pocket, too, than when I accepted this melancholy legacy, but what of that. I did my best, man can do no more."

"But you will have rest now," said his wife.

"I shall, I hope, have peace. I have done with Robert—I have done with the business; a little more and I shall have done with Mrs. Osborne and her daughters."

"They are going away?"

"They are. I have said so to Mrs. Osborne. They will make themselves another home. Between her, and Isabella, and me, there could be nothing but harsh discord; and peace I must have, be the cost what it will."

"Ay," thought Adèle, "and he will have done with me, too. I, too, shall be cast away," but she said again,—

"And you will have rest, now?"

"Ay, plenty," he carelessly replied. "Mademoiselle de Janson would not be disgusted now at the sound of the forge. It is, or it soon will be, silent. The working-men will find other masters; the rushing water will turn a wheel no more. Its power has been lessening fast of late. I took that as my warning, and I shall never repent having abided by its decision. I am superstitious in this; if Nature pronounces against me, I obey her."

"And you will get rid of Morel?" she said, endeavouring to prolong the discourse.

"He is gone."

"Gone! I am glad of it—I fear traitors."

A smile, beautiful in its irony, played around her husband's lips.

"They are shallow," he said, "to be despised and avoided, if you like, but not to be feared. I say they are shallow. Did that traitor, Morel—did Madame de Launay, who, in her way, is a little bit of a traitress, did they, I say, spite the openness with which I proceeded, so much as suspect my intentions? They did

not; the mist of low cunning was on their eyes so that they could not see—and they did not. They thought, he is unbusiness like, he knows not what he is doing; he is ruining himself, the fool, let him; and to their own cost, to their own sorrow to-day, they did let me go on."

"But what is this to Madame de Launay?" asked Adèle.

Mr. Osborne smiled down at his wife.

"Let her accounts at the end of this year answer the question," he said; "but I do not pity her, she was selfish beyond the law of self-defence—just is the retribution."

Adèle felt sick and faint. She thought how little she had known of her husband, how little, in many respects, she knew of him still. How his suavity, how his courtesy, how his gentleness, concealed depths of strength, of coldness, of will, which she had never sounded; and remembering what was coming, spite of all this delay, her heart sank within her. Mr. Osborne looked at his wife.

"Adèle," he said, "have you nothing to say to me?"

She did not answer. He rose; he was very pale; his lips quivered, and grew thin and white as he spoke, but otherwise he showed no undue emotion. His look was calm, his voice was even and measured.

"Adèle," he said, "you have succeeded. I had not married you for love, but I loved you. I would not have chosen one so young, but you were as dear to me as are the chosen wives of happy husbands. I have been slow to understand that this affection was a burden and a pain to you; but I see it too clearly now, and I repeat it, you have succeeded. If you wished for my coldness you have it, and for ever. The affection you show me would satisfy no man, and will certainly not satisfy me. From mine you are henceforth free. Yet we must live in peace and in amity. If you were not so young and so lonely we should separate; but, as that is impossible, you must bear with my presence. With more you shall never be troubled. I have not your confidence, I have not your affection. Every effort I have made to earn either has rendered you wretched. I desist; your friend, your protector, I am by duty and inclination, but I am no more—you do not wish it—nor do I. I confess it, your caprices have wearied my affection; they have offended my pride; love is cold and dead. I am sorry for you—you are young, and this is a bitter ending to the dreams of youth; for me it does not matter. It is plain I was not meant to be loved of woman, and since I did not know how to shape my destiny better, why I must abide by my lot."

He turned away and left the room.

"Love is cold and dead," said Adèle, looking around her drearily.

This was the old Hall where Mademoiselle de Janson had moaned "that the world was going away." Kneeling on that spot she had for the first time beheld him, and felt the wakening of a lifelong worship in her heart. He was standing there when she gave him her hand and pledged him her life. Sitting by that hearth with him, she had called him her lord and her king; and now he had told her that "love was cold and dead!"

"Dead!" she moaned, "dead!"

She hid her face in her hands. Presently she felt something creeping near her; she looked, and saw Lilian, who gazed up at her wonderingly. With some passion Adèle caught up her husband's child.

"Lilian," she cried, "my heart will break! I have told my trouble to none, and I must tell it to you. He does not love me—he has told me so—he does not love me."

More she could not say; it was the sum, the full-up measure of human misery. She did not hear the opening door; she did not see Mrs. Osborne stand awhile on the threshold, then close the door again, and vanish like a passing vision.

CHAPTER XLVII.

EMPIRE.

"Love is cold and dead!" In his heart, too, the sad words rang. He looked calm as he uttered them, but there are deep, passionate currents below smooth and still waters. Her pale face haunted him. His own wrath, which he had subdued externally, but which was deep within, followed him like a spectre, and trod in his steps. He crossed the court, he entered the garden, he walked fast; he came unconsciously to the steps that led to the lake; his long-neglected boat lay there waiting for him. At once he leaped in; a few strokes of the oar sent him on the lake. The world and its troubles, life and its cares, seemed left behind. "Nature," balm of all sorrows, soother of all torments," he thought, "blessed be thou ever. Mistress that canst not cloy, pure delight that

canst never weary, the few glad hours of a sad life I owe to thee!"

He rowed on; the grey mists rolled along the mountains; chill and white was their aspect. He passed the little town of Nantua, the white dwelling where Alice had lived. He saw on the opposite shore the grey old church where he had married Adèle, and at length he entered a wilder part of the lake; a silent and solitary little bay, where the down of the wild bird floated on the still waters, where long green herbs hung down from the rocks, where the reed rose straight and still, and the white water-lily slept on a glassy bed.

He moored his boat; he leaped on land. The wild delight of liberty and solitude seized and swayed his whole being. He lay down on a mossy rock; he looked at those mists that seemed as if they would fall around him, and wrap him in their cold embrace. His glance wandered over the gloomy little bay shut in by steep mountains; he saw a black speck pass in the grey air above; it was the hawk swaying there for his quarry. He saw a long-legged crane stand in the green waters below, and watch intently for his prey. The sense of a rugged, savage solitude came to him, and with it a rapt and beating heart. Love, marriage, misery, and bliss, were forgotten in one divine dream. He was not the manufacturer, he was not the man of business, he was not the husband of Adèle, he was William Osborne the dreamer, the wanderer who went from land to land, unfettered by ties, howsoever sweet, whose will was his law, whose home was every spot where Nature could bless, and man could not intrude.

But the day was worn; evening was falling down on earth and her homes. Mr. Osborne once more crossed the lake, and returned to Courcelles, to life, and all its cares; and all the cares he had left behind him seemed to come forth to meet him as he entered the garden. With deep and bitter reluctance, with weariness and pain, he walked up the alley that led to the Manor. His arms were folded, his eyes were downcast, and he was lost in thought; but a gloom passed across the sky, and he felt though he saw it not. He looked up; before him rose the Manor, quiet and grey, and from an upper window smoke dense and dark was pouring; upwards it went, till drifted by the south wind it spread in pale yellow on the sky. Mr. Osborne looked on petrified. The trees swayed gently to the breeze; birds twittered in their boughs; the flowers were closing for the night, and not a sound, not a breath moved the air around the fated dwelling.

But suddenly there arose a piercing cry, then exclamations

and shouts followed. "Fire!" resounded everywhere. "Fire!" The whole house grew alive, as if it shielded a multitude. The doors of Mr. Osborne's study and of the conservatory broke open; through one came Mrs. Osborne, Isabella and Anna appeared at the other; the servants rushed out from the low stone arch that led to the court, and all hurried into the garden wild with horror, pale with mute dread. Before any one knew how or whence he had come, Mr. Osborne stood in the very midst of the crowd of terrified faces.

"Where is Adèle?" he cried, vainly looking for her; "where is Lillian?"

No one knew, no one spoke; no one dared to say they were within the burning house.

"Where is Adèle?" he cried again.

There was the same dead silence, and still the dark smoke poured forth from the arched window set in the roof, and in its density there was the glimmer of a tongue of flame, as of a spirit moving in Erebus.

"Good God!" he cried, looking over the whole vast pile; "not to know where?"

"In the room of Madame Lascours," suddenly said Anna.

He bounded up the steps, entered the drawing-room, and was on the staircase, dark and stifling with smoke, in a moment.

"Adèle!" his voice rang through the house; "Adèle! Lillian!"

The smoke poured down thicker, and there was a crackling of wood above. The room of Madame Lascours was on the second floor,—he knew the door, and found it. He entered; Alice was kneeling by her bed, but she was alone.

"Where is Adèle?" he cried.

She did not answer.

"Quick; fly! the house is on fire!"

Vain warning. She did not move, she was senseless. He set his teeth with something between despair and anger; he could not leave her there to perish; but where was Lillian, where was his wife? He seized Madame Lascours and lifted her up; he bore her away; in a few minutes he had placed her on the stone steps where he had found Adèle on the evening of his return. His eye ran rapidly over the group gathered there. He saw Lillian's *bonne*, Marie, standing and looking up in stupid terror. He went up to her.

"Where are they?" he said, imperatively.

She stared and replied,—

"I left them in Mademoiselle Lilian's room. I thought they were coming."

Cold sweat gathered on his brow. The smoke still poured out of one window; behind the glass of the next a vivid flame shot up, and that was Lilian's room. For a moment Mr. Osborne looked up with mute, despairing doubt: were they devoured by the fire above? was that fatal smoke stifling them in the staircase?

"Oh, this is horrible!" said Mrs. Osborne.

Even as she spoke the light grew brighter in Lilian's room. The curtains were burning, and behind that sheet of flame Mr. Osborne had a wife and a child. He re-entered the house and vanished.

"Oh, this is horrible!" said Mrs. Osborne again.

No one else spoke. Terror, breathless and deep, had enchanted them all into silence. Madame Lascours had recovered slowly; she sat on the stone steps looking up. Suddenly she veiled her eyes with a low cry; Mr. Osborne was walking on the slanting roof in which, as we have already said, the heavy, round-headed windows of the third floor were set.

He had found it impossible to reach from within the room of Lilian. As he ascended, the smoke drove him back; he had taken another staircase and gone out by a trap-door in one of the garrets on the roof; then a few steps brought him to the window; he leaped down on the stone balcony that guarded it, and seizing with both hands a hatchet he had found on his way, he gave it a vigorous blow; it yielded with a crash; the shiver of the glass was heard below; out shot the flames, clinging on one side of the stone frame-work, and leaving on the other a gap dark and scorching, in which he vanished; it closed behind him; for a while the bent and broken wood glittered like thin, bright lines on a sombre background, then fell in; thick, magnificent in their fury, the purple flames came pouring out, edged with a keen, vivid blue, and driving and consuming the smoke before them, like a victorious foe his conquered enemy, as they went forth on the air.

By the burning light of the fire, Mr. Osborne saw his wife. She stood at the extreme end of the room, leaning back against the wall, like one who could go no further; her arms were thrown around Lilian and held her fast; the terrified child had hidden her face in her stepmother's garments, and clung to her wildly; but with pallid cheeks, and fixed eyes, Adèle looked at the approaching flames.

She saw her husband. With a cry she sprang to him; he

threw his right arm around her; in his left he caught up Lillian but the door resisted him; in her blind, mad terror, Marie had locked it; with one strong effort he burst it open. They ran along a narrow corridor; the hot fire was pressing on them fast; they reached the back staircase; it was safe, but stifling; they descended; the second floor was reached; but dense vapours stopped the way by which Mr. Osborne had come; they turned aside; they crossed rooms that seemed endless; they were in the court; burning stones from above, hot tiles from the roof, fell thick around them; and now they have entered the narrow passage that leads to the garden; they are in it; the scorching heat of the fire is behind them; above them they see a starry sky; the pure fresh air from mountain and lake meets their faces.

For the first time Mr. Osborne spoke.

"Adèle, are you hurt?" he cried.

"No—no—are you?"

"No—how is Lillian?"

He set down the child. Lillian was still wild with fright, but quite sound. They stood all three, safe, and beyond the reach of harm, in the garden.

"Thank God!" exclaimed Adèle, sinking down on her knees on the grass; "thank God!" she said again, as she embraced the child fervently.

Mr. Osborne raised them both, and clasped them to a heart no less grateful that its thanks remained unspoken.

"And Alice and the rest?" she cried, suddenly.

"They are safe. You were the last. What had taken you in the very midst of the fire?"

"I ran up for Lillian; but we both must have died if you had not come to us! a delivering angel."

Her arms were around his neck; fervently she looked up in his face; he put down Lillian, and clasped his wife more closely. He was much moved, not with her last words, which he scarcely heeded, but with those other words which she said so simply: "I ran up for Lillian." Who else had thought of Lillian?

But their voices had been heard; footsteps came hurrying up the garden alleys; Alice first appeared, pale and silent; then Mrs. Osborne, who outstripped her, rapid and anxious; then Anna, who hung terrified on her still more terrified sister; then the moving, confused group of servants, among them Jean, conspicuously gaunt and trembling.

"This is a great mercy!" said Mrs. Osborne, approaching her stepson. "You have saved them—and you are safe."

"Ah! your are hurt!" cried Adèle.

"A mere scratch," he replied, looking at his hand. A falling stone had grazed it, and it bled profusely. "It is nothing; do not mind it."

They gathered around him; he sat down on a bench; Adèle knelt on the ground at his feet, and staunched the blood with her handkerchief.

"Nothing—nothing!" she repeated, and she looked up at him with a passionate distress which he remembered later.

"It will be nothing," calmly said Mrs. Osborne. "Can nothing be done to stop that fire?" she added, impatiently.

"Nothing," he composedly answered; "it is too high. It will burn a few rooms and exhaust its own fury."

But that fury was a magnificent though terrible sight. The roof was falling in; the flames were streaming up in the quiet sky; they covered its evening purple with a lurid glow; they cast fiery glimmers on mountain and lake; they filled the garden with a fitful splendour, and gave to the upraised faces of the helpless lookers-on a strange spectral look. Mr. Osborne admired the gorgeous spectacle, but his stepmother's step sounded quick and impatient in the gravelled alley, as she walked up and down; there was a flush on her cheek and a frown on her brow, and she at length exclaimed:

"William, I must give a few orders, with your permission."

"Certainly," he said.

Scarcely waiting for his reply, she turned to the servants.

"Mathieu, take a boat and go to Nantua; ask for the engines. Jean, run and call the men from the mill; Marie, no you are too stupid with fear, you, Justine, will do better, run and fetch Docteur Guillaume. Quick—Begone."

They flew at her authoritative voice; Mr. Osborne smiled, and said:

"To-morrow would have done for Docteur Guillaume; there are no men at the mill; the fire will be out before Mathieu has reached Nantua. Look at those flames, Adèle."

She had bound his hand, and she was sitting by him. With a shudder she hid her face against him, and replied:

"I cannot look."

But Lilian, now much recovered, climbed up on the bench to see better.

"Oh, how it burns!" she cried, "how it burns!"

Mr. Osborne laid his injured hand on the shoulder of his wife, and kissed Lilian's cheek.

"Let it burn," he said, philosophically; "the King need not care much for the palace when he has saved the jewels of the crown."

Mrs. Osborne bit her lip to repress a sharp remark at what she considered his supineness, but the event justified his clear-sightedness.

Within half-an-hour the fire was over, and no aid had come. Through broad gaps in the roof there still rose a murky vapour, that dimmed the crescent moon, but fire and flame had sunk back in the crater of the abyss, and the Manor rose before them, scorched, blackened, with sunken roof and round holes instead of the upper windows, but with solid basement, with walls still ready to defy the might of time, strong as any rock-built citadel.

Mrs. Osborne looked at it and did not see it; the fire, the havoc, the loss, troubled her not. She pondered over those words she had overheard, "He does not love me." "Of course he does not," thought Mrs. Osborne, looking at Adèle, who still sat by her husband. "He is not the man to love a woman. Intellect in him ever keeps passion chained, and pride ever curbs fondness. You have tried him, a man, too far. He is lost, estranged, and never will he return to you. Never—never, for all that passionate look which he gave back so coldly. Like images in a dream, the wife who could not keep his fondness, the brother who could not keep his trust, the sister who could not keep his liking, have passed athwart his life. They have left him what he was a year ago; the cold dreamer, the suffering, weary man. He hates me, he mistrusts me, and through that very hate and that mistrust I have prevailed so far that I am still his father's widow whom he must respect, whom he must dismiss with a show of courtesy. Go! I will not go—my hour is come, as their hour has passed. I will stay, and I will rule him."

And as the group was breaking up, she went to her stepson, and taking him away a few steps in an alley, she said, impressively,—

"William, I cannot leave to-morrow, under these circumstances. I wish to suggest no possible evil, but your wife looks ill—quite ill. Take my advice, make her rest, rest yourself, and leave all the managing to me. In a week, in ten days, I shall go as we agreed this morning. Isabella's peace of mind requires it. To keep her here would be barbarous. I have no wish to stay myself."

She spoke with great seeming candour. He glanced at his wife, and half in conviction, half in courtesy, Mr. Osborne accepted her offer.

Mrs. Osborne at once entered on her duties—so far as it was possible in the absence of Jeannette, who was out, and had the keys in her pocket.

Jeannette had a married niece who lived in one of the valleys around Courcelles. Jeannette rarely saw her; her niece had half-a-dozen children to mind, and Jeannette had a world of things to do in Courcelles, which no one else could possibly accomplish. But on the day when Adèle was to go to Mérimy, it occurred to Jeannette that she too could indulge in a promenade, and though that projected journey was relinquished, Jeannette did not for this give up her plans. She went, remained the whole day out, and returned when night was fairly set in.

The road was lonely, but a pale moon lit it; Jeannette, moreover, had a brave heart, and knew not fear. She walked on sturdily, not minding the bushes and the clefts on her right, or the lake on her left, until the turning of the road brought her in view of the Manor of Courcelles.

"My sight is getting bad," thought Jeannette, rubbing her eyes, "and I cannot see the roof."

She looked again and again; but still the roof was invisible, and at length Jeannette was obliged to conclude that her eyes were all right, but that the roof was all wrong. She did not stop to wonder about it, she ran on, and reached, amazed and breathless, the entrance door, by which Jean stood, holding Docteur Guillaume's little horse.

"Monsieur Jean!" she cried, in the tone of an adjuration, "what has happened to the roof of the house?"

"Burned down—down to the ground!" groaned Jean. He belonged to the popular class of alarmists.

"I shall never believe that," said Jeannette, resolutely, "there is a prophecy against it. Courcelles cannot burn. The English tried it; the Huguenots tried it; and the Revolutionists tried it; and Courcelles would not burn. Besides, do I not see it there before me?" she added, as if the visible fact were only the confirmation of the prophecy.

"I never saw anything burn like that third story," groaned Jean, "it lit up the whole country as with the bonfires of Midsummer's night. Monsieur has all but lost his arm. He and Docteur Guillaume say it is a scratch; but for my part I think amputation the only safe course. I have always understood that when limbs are not amputated in time, mortification follows."

"You do not mean to say that anything has happened to Mamselle Adèle?" gasped Jeannette.

"She would have been burned but for Monsieur," replied Jean, with doleful triumph; "but, thank God! we have had no disaster save Monsieur's arm, and that is bad enough," he added.

A burst of tears of joy, and of moans of horror, partly relieved Jeannette. Next followed the strange but emphatic declaration—

"Monsieur Jean, Morel, the wretch, is at the bottom of this. He has an old grudge against our little mistress, and he is at the bottom of it."

"But he is gone, Mademoiselle Jeannette."

"He went to hide his game; but I have no more time to lose. Let me in. A pretty mess they have made of it in my absence."

Jeannette entered, all eagerness to act, all anxiety to do everything and be all things in a moment; but she found a person who had already assumed the task, and who seemed much more disposed to order Jeannette about than to stand or sit still while she should be doing. Mrs. Osborne had seized on the reins of domestic authority, and she grasped them with a tight and vigorous hand.

The ground-floor and the first story had not suffered from the fire, but the bed-rooms, though probably untouched, were not to be approached, and the whole house was in disorder. Mrs. Osborne was in the Hall with her daughters; she was as active and energetic as they were listless. Isabella sat by a table, with her elbow leaning upon it, and a look that implied, once the fright of the thing over, she cared very little whether the house was burned or not. Anna sat back in a chair, and moaned. She had been compelled to leave her room precipitately; she had caught her death of cold in the garden; and it was very cruel and very selfish to have a fire in the house when she was in that state of health.

"Will that provoking old woman never come?" indignantly exclaimed Mrs. Osborne, looking at her watch.

And the provoking old woman, who was no other than Jeannette, opened the door, and entered the apartment, thinking to find her young mistress there.

Mrs. Osborne drew herself up, and looked amazed and majestic.

"Oh, you have returned!" she said frigidly; "another time I beg you will have the goodness not to take the keys of the store-room with you. Go at once, and fetch the requisite number of blankets and sheets; tell Justine that dinner ought to have been served up ten minutes ago, and that if she does not recover her

wits, I shall send her away to morrow-morning. Where is Jean, that he is not bringing down the couches from upstairs as I told him? Well, what is the woman standing there and staring for?"

"If you please, Madame," coolly said Jeannette, "I shall go and speak with my mistress, Madame Osborne. Perhaps she, too, has some orders to give me. As to the keys," rapidly added Jeannette, "if I keep them, it is because my mistress, Madame Osborne, tells me to do so."

In vain Mrs. Osborne drew herself up, and crushed Jeannette with a look of her blue eyes. The old servant had the true instinct of war in her. In the sudden authority assumed by Mrs. Osborne she saw the dawn of a domestic revolution likely to upset the legitimate authority of Adèle.

"It is not because the roof of the house is burned that she is going to have her way," thought Jeannette; and without troubling herself with Justine or Jean, she went at once to Mr. Osborne's study. There, as she had ascertained from Marie, whom she had met and scolded on the way, she was to find Adèle. But Adèle was in her husband's room, and in the study there was no one save Mr. Osborne himself and Docteur Guillaume, who was dressing the injured limb Jean so earnestly desired to see amputated.

"What do you want?" asked Mr. Osborne, rather shortly, for Jeannette had entered without knocking.

"I came to take Madame's orders," stoutly said Jeannette.

"Go to my stepmother. Your mistress is in bed and must not be disturbed. You think nothing of that fever of hers, do you?" he added, addressing Docteur Guillaume.

"Nothing at all; she has been frightened, that is all," was the brief reply. "Jeannette, just hold your master's arm, will you."

Jeannette obeyed, Mr. Osborne pursued—

"Her health has not been good of late; do you not advise total repose?"

"Certainly, and especially no annoyance, no emotion. There, you may go now," he added, addressing Jeannette.

She withdrew, deeply disgusted with Mr. Osborne. "She has had her way," she thought, "she has had her way."

Resistance being useless, she submitted to Mrs. Osborne, and produced, as desired, the sheets and the blankets, and justice compels us to add, what Jeannette would never have acknowledged, that sagacity, prudence, and decision characterized Mrs.

Osborne's proceedings. Within an hour beds were ready every where, and a tolerable dinner even appeared on the table. Mr. Osborne, who wore his arm in a sling, complimented his step-mother.

"You would make an excellent commissariat," he said.

"I am happy to have been able to supply the place of our dear Adèle," graciously replied Mrs. Osborne.

"Ay, you perfidious serpent," thought Jeannette, who was waiting at table; Jean's mind had been found unequal to the task.

"I hope she will be well to-morrow," pursued Mrs. Osborne; "William, are you not sitting down with us?"

"Docteur Guillaume recommends low diet, but I am happy to see you so well provided. Good night."

"Good night, my dear William," most graciously said his stepmother; "pray tell Adèle not to trouble herself with anything; to leave everything to me."

"I am so much obliged to you," said Mr. Osborne; "she is very unwell, and Docteur Guillaume recommends rest."

He left the room.

"It is a conspiracy against my poor lamb," groaned Jeannette; "a vile conspiracy!"

But it was a conspiracy which she resolved to defeat by a warning appeal to its destined victim. The opportunity offered itself the very next morning.

It was late when Adèle awoke after a feverish night, during which she had ever seen her husband sitting by her, watching patiently, but he was gone now, and she thought herself alone, until a light sound made her look around; she saw Alice standing at the head of her bed, quiet and grave. She bent over her, and asked how she was.

"I am well, thank you; I shall get up."

Alice assisted her to rise and to dress, without summoning Madame Leroy, who, like Jean, was unwell with fright.

"You have seen him this morning?" suddenly said Adèle; "how did he look?"

"He looked well."

There was another pause, then Adèle, sitting down on the edge of the bed, spoke again:

"Alice, did I not warn you the fire had broken out as I passed by your room—or did I dream it?"

"You did not dream, you warned me, but I fainted with cowardly dread. Mr. Osborne came looking for you, I believe,

and found me senseless. I awoke safe in the garden, thanks to him. Even in that, you see, I could not help being a trouble and a burden."

"So was I."

"Oh, no; your husband says much of your calmness and courage."

Adèle showed no emotion; he might speak well of her, he might have saved her life, he might have sat up with her all night. What matter—she knew he was estranged, for all that.

The morning was fine, and Adèle said she should like to walk in the garden. She went out with Alice, and cast a long apathetic look at the blackened and broken line of roof that disfigured the Manor. She met Lilian in one of the alleys, and she gave the child, for whose life she had risked her own, a cold embrace. At length she sat down listlessly in one of the arbours, and answered her companion with monosyllables, until all conversation became at a standstill. They had not been silent long when Mrs. Osborne came up and affectionately kissed her daughter-in-law.

"My dearest, how are you?" she said tenderly; "William gives sad accounts of you."

"Does he?" said Adèle, surprised.

"He does not seem to feel his arm at all," pursued Mrs. Osborne; "he is now exploring what I may call the ruins."

Adèle turned pale.

"You do not mean to say that he is gone upstairs?" she cried.

"My dear, there is no danger; he is prudent; he studied architecture in his youth; my dear, where are you going?"

Adèle was not going, she was gone. She had risen, as if by magic; she ran down the alley, she entered the house, she vanished, all in a moment.

"Ah! Madame!" cried Alice, much alarmed, "what have you done! I knew where Monsieur Osborne was, but I did not tell her."

"Allow me to say you were wrong," quietly replied Mrs. Osborne, "her presence may restrain him; my representations failed; hers may prevail."

Alice, who had risen to follow Adèle, sat down again.

"I am anxious about Adèle," pursued Mrs. Osborne, "and so is her husband. Her health is not good. Docteur Guillaume recommends a repose incompatible with the cares of a household. Do you know, my dear Madame Lascours, I cannot help think-

ing that you, who are so old a friend of hers, ought to relieve her for awhile from this heavy responsibility."

"I!" cried Alice, much startled, "and why not you, Madame?"

Mrs. Osborne smiled gently.

"William has asked me; but I may say to you what I cannot say to him: Adèle might think that I was seeking to usurp. Whereas with you—"

"No—no—I cannot," interrupted Madame Lasours; "I am not of the family; I cannot—I must not."

"I am sorry you view it in that light," said Mrs. Osborne; "allow me," she added, taking her arm and leading her down an alley, "allow me to argue the matter with you."

Mr. Osborne had gone up through the drawing-room; he had reached the second floor without trouble; but there began the region of havoc and peril; still he went on; he came to the room of Adèle, it had escaped as by miracle; her work still lay on the table, her glove had remained on a chair; all was untouched, unharmed. Mr. Osborne left the room, locked the door, and attempted to proceed; but hot and shattered floors under his feet; above his head a roof that let in the sky; around him rent walls blackened with the smoke that still lingered in the abyss below, warned him not to proceed. He stood looking, measuring with his eye the extent of the ruin, when suddenly he was conscious of a presence; before he could look round, Adèle stood by him on that insecure floor, divided only by a few paces from the dark gap.

"What brought you up here?" he asked, very much displeased. "How could you be so imprudent!"

Her cheeks were burning—her eyes were bright with fever; she smiled at his question, which she did not answer.

"You wanted to see your room," he pursued; "well, it has escaped, but you cannot see it; you must not stay here; the place is not safe."

He took her arm and led her down; but he considered the garden too warm for her; he accordingly took her to the Hall, and there he left her with his two sisters.

Isabella sat by a window, absorbed in gloomy and sullen meditation; Anna was taking her breakfast alone, and looked crossly at her sister-in-law.

"I went to your room to bid you good-bye," she said; "I thought you were so ill—I had my trouble for nothing."

"You are going," said Adèle, sinking down listlessly on a chair.

"Yes, I am. I told William I would not stay in a burning house, so he said I might go to Méridy and have the house he had taken for you; but he says you must not come with me."

"Will not Isabella?" asked Adèle.

"I!" disdainfully replied Isabella. "What should I go to Méridy for?"

"Will not Mrs. Osborne?"

"Mamma," crossly replied Anna, "is too busy here. It seems you are so ill, you can attend to nothing, and William has asked mamma to take care of the house, and so she cannot come."

Adèle looked both uninterested and unmoved; but her natural kindness induced her to say:

"You may take Madame Leroy, if you like; Jeannette will do for me, and Madame Leroy was disappointed, I know, at remaining behind."

Anna relaxed considerably, and thought she did like; but could not help reproaching Isabella for her unsisterly conduct, which she contrasted with the kindness of Adèle. The only answer of Isabella, was—

"What should I go to Méridy for?"

"If you were like Adèle," began Anna.

Adèle did not wait to hear the rest; she stole out of the room. She longed for silence, for solitude, for peace. The garden might be warm, but a quiet alley, even though it were sun-burnt, was all she now wished for. Her desire was not to be gratified. She had not walked ten steps towards the Maze, when she met Jeannette. The old woman went up to her, and said resolutely,—

"I have been looking for Madame the whole morning. Madame must be so good as to give me a few orders. Madame need not take any trouble; she need only say, 'do it,' and it shall be done."

"Speak to your master," replied Adèle.

Jeannette knew this would lead to a reference to Mrs. Osborne, she stoutly said,—

"Madame is my mistress."

"Speak to your master," replied Adèle, again.

"Monsieur hates the trouble."

"Then speak to Mrs. Osborne."

This was a blow, but Jeannette did not give in.

"The fire has upset Madame," she said, "but what about it? Monsieur will repair Courcelles, and Madame's great grandchildren

will live and die in it yet. But, in the meanwhile, Madame must rouse herself. That Madame Osborne is coming creeping like a cat. They must not have their way too much with Monsieur. They must not take away the management of the house from Madame—I say they must not. Madame Osborne is carrying it with a high hand; I say she must not be allowed to go on.”

“I would not raise my finger to check her,” said Adèle, moodily.

“But she shall not have her way, nor Mademoiselle Isabella, either,” persisted Jeannette; “I declare they both came and counted the blankets last night over me. Did they think I was a thief?”

But Adèle remained unmoved, and utterly indifferent.

“What do I care?” she said; “let them rule the house from the garret to the cellar—what do I care!”

“Madame must care. It is her husband—it is her house. Madame must care.”

Adèle smiled, for she thought, “He is my husband no more;—the house is his, not mine. Let me but have a corner in it, and I am content.”

In vain Jeannette tried to rouse her. Pride and ambition were dead in her heart.

“They have broken her spirit,” groaned Jeannette; “they have conquered.”

“*They*,” thought Adèle, “oh, no—not they. If I had but him, I would defy them all.”

But she looked rather coldly in Jeannette’s face, and said, gravely:

“You surprise me. What do you mean?”

“Ah, Madame, where is the use of hiding from me. You will only break your poor little heart.”

“Jeannette!”

“Madame, do you remember the history of Mademoiselle de Courcelles? No—well then, let me tell it to you. Pray do.”

Adèle did not answer.

“When she lived I do not know, but she was a rich lady, and a beautiful one. She was reared by a married sister, whose brother-in-law fell in love with her and she with him; but he was destined to the church. They were parted in great wrath, and it was some time before they met again, at the court of, I know not what queen. He was not a priest, but a marquis, and a man of the world; he had but to ask in order to have her, but he did not. He looked at her as if he had never seen her before; she was just

as proud, for she had a high spirit. She looked gay and merry, and happy, and did not mind him, and at length he went away. He said not a word, nor did she. But when he was fairly gone she broke into moans and cries of grief. Nothing ailed her but this lamenting, which in a few days took her to her grave. They were burying her, when a gentleman, who was entering the city, saw the white bier and flowers, and asked the name of the dead girl. They told him, upon which he gave a great cry, and dropping from his horse, expired on the spot. It was her lover come back to be forgiven."

"Well, Jeannette, what about that story?" asked Adèle, very gravely.

"Ah, Madame, if you are so silent and so proud, your heart will break as hers broke, not with the grief, perhaps, but with the concealment."

"What a dreamer you are, Jeannette," said Adèle, smiling, "yet your story is pretty, though so sad. Only the lady's name was not Courcelles, but De Tournon; and the lover did not die, Jeannette. I have read it all in one of Monsieur Osborne's books. It happened at the court of the Queen of Navarre, and the lover recovered and married, and forgot his first love."

Jeannette looked at her mistress very earnestly; but Adèle bore the look firmly. She had made to his child one passionate complaint; after this she had locked up her heart, and vowed that no human being should look down its bitter depths, or so much as catch a glimpse of its agony. She gave Jeannette another look and walked away.

Jeannette stood for awhile in the path, then said aloud, and with some solemnity,—

"I must meddle."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

JEANNETTE.

ANNA went to Méridy; Isabella did not utter ten words from morning until bedtime; Mr. Osborne was busy repairing Courcelles, and apparently absorbed in the task; Mrs. Osborne kindly gave up her intended departure, and ruled house and servants, and was steadily creeping, as Jeannette said, to unlimited author-

ity; and Alice stayed day after day in the vain hope of solacing one who would not be solaced. Adèle was both humble and proud, and her love partook of that humility, and of that pride.

The humility of women who love may take two aspects. A woman may be humble, because she is a woman, and acknowledge in the man who has chosen her, a being nobler than herself. Her humility is that of one sex to the other. It is painful, for it strikes at the very root of love. If woman is inferior to man she is not worthy of him. It is degradation in him to love her; it is folly in her to love a higher creature whose feelings she can never hope to partake.

There is another humility which should never be mistaken for this—it is the acknowledgment born of love, that she who loves can never be good, or beautiful, or accomplished enough for the loved one—the humility of worship that delights in its own personal abasement to one object. That, too, may go too far, but its source is touching and not degrading. “I never can be worthy of you,” it says, “yet we are of one nature. I never can be all that you are, but I can share your feelings, and be a partaker of your hopes. No pitiless barrier of different kind, of natural inferiority divides and torments us—you by the knowledge that you move alone on earth, I by the feeling, that though I should strive for ever, I never can reach you.”

It is a humility that rests on the knowledge that when God gave man a companion, he poured the same divine spirit into the frailer form. He denied it much that man has, and bestowed on it much that man has not. He established an external difference of qualities which cannot be violated without impunity, but no inferiority of nature.

These were not subjects on which Adèle speculated much; but this she felt, that if as Adèle she could never be worthy of the love of a man whom she admired and loved infinitely, yet as a woman she might have had that love in its fulness. As Adèle she was humble, and as a woman and a wife she was proud. He had pronounced an unjust and a hard sentence; she submitted to it without a word of murmur because it was unjust. She did nothing to soften, nothing to charm him. She had made the effort once, but then she did not love him. No woman who loves can try and charm a cold man. Passion has vehement reproaches, eloquent bitterness, or scornful, silent pride, but no arts, no seductions to win back a lost or estranged heart.

Adèle was calm and gentle with her husband; she did not look the reproaches she did not speak. She did not hint what she would

not say openly. She was grateful when he was kind; she confessed she was not quite well, and submitted with great docility to the quietness Dr. Guillaume prescribed. She showed no displeasure because Mrs. Osborne reigned in the house; she betrayed and she felt no jealousy when Mr. Osborne and Alice were together. Jealousy was dead, like his love; grief had conquered and slain it. She had never imputed wrong to her husband or to her friend. The thought of harm could not come near Alice, and he was incapable of a baseness. She had only thought that he admired Alice more than he admired her; that if he had been free he would have taken Alice and left her by. She thought this, and it was very bitter; and now she thought nothing at all. She had lost his affection; they were divided; they lived in one house; she bore his name; but she was his wife no more. How, then, could she be jealous? It would have been foolish and childish—it was impossible.

And thus matters went on; and though his mute sorrow was wasting her away, with a rapidity that tormented Mr. Osborne so much, that he could scarcely bear to see her, feeling, as he did, that he had done it, and could not undo it, and that even if he could, her strange caprices would make him do it again; though we say Adèle was sinking rapidly, Jeannette either could not make up her mind, or she could not find the opportunity for that interference, which was to work such wonders.

One afternoon, indeed, she did make up her mind, and, meeting Mr. Osborne in the garden, she was going to address him and take him roundly to task for breaking the heart of his poor little wife, when her kind intent was frustrated by the sudden appearance of Mrs. Osborne. Jeannette walked into a neighbouring alley, and stayed there, and we are sorry to say listened. A thick hedge did not allow her to hear all; but she heard plenty to make her blood boil.

"My dear William, I want more money, if you please. If you will look at my accounts—"

Mr. Osborne, who hated accounts, interrupted her to ask how much she wanted. Jeannette did not hear the reply, but she remembered with a groan that Adèle had never touched a five-franc piece of her husband's money since his return. "She has got the purse, and she will keep it," she thought.

"My dear William," urged Mrs. Osborne, again, "can you, with your mind, think of burying yourself here? Think of Lilian, too. Her large fortune requires a brilliant education, which cannot be had here. Why not sell Courcelles, and settle in Paris?"

"Sell Courcelles!" thought Jeannette, "and break my darling's heart. Oh! the serpent."

She had not the consolation of hearing Mr. Osborne's reply; for he said in English—Mrs. Osborne had used French:—

"I should not like to sell Courcelles, if it were only on account of Adèle, who loves the place."

"Very true," replied Mrs. Osborne, using English likewise, to Jeannette's infinite mortification; "very true—and her mind is in that delicate, tender state—pray do not look alarmed; but you know she is of a strange, irritable, wayward family."

Mr. Osborne was too much affected at this hint to reply, and with this Parthian shaft his stepmother left him. Mr. Osborne remained absorbed in thought. Jeannette, trembling with wrath at these two facts which she had gathered—Mrs. Osborne had got the purse; Mrs. Osborne had proposed to part with Courcelles—left her hiding place, and waylaid her master. He was walking up an alley that led to the Manor; his arms were folded; his eyes were downcast; yet he saw her, and at once stopped short.

"Where is your mistress?" he asked. He put the question for the purpose of shunning his wife. He felt no anger against her, but a sad displeasure that made her aspect painful to him. It so happened that Jeannette could answer his question.

"Madame is in her room," she said, "lying on her bed."

"What ails her?" he asked.

Jeannette shook her head.

"It is not easy to say what ails Madame," she said. "They have always been an odd family."

Mr. Osborne looked thoughtful. He had always considered Mademoiselle de Janson of unsound mind. Was it possible that insanity pervaded the family of his wife? Could it be that the strangeness of Adèle proceeded from so sad a source? It sickened him to think of it. With a vivacity and a sharpness of which he was not conscious, he said to Jeannette:

"You have been long in the family; what hereditary complaint is there in it?"

"A hereditary complaint!" indignantly exclaimed Jeannette, "none that I know of save stubbornness and pride."

"What did my wife's mother die of?" he persisted, his suspicions strengthened.

Jeannette gave him a sad, stern look.

"Madame de Courcelles," she said, "died of the complaint of which her mother had died before her, and it is the saddest complaint a woman can have. She died of a broken heart be-

cause she had a bad husband; her mother died of the same disease, because she had a good one—my young master, who died of a bad fall from his horse. Monsieur de Courcelles, who was the father of my young mistress, Madame Osborne, was killed in a duel, by the husband of a lady whom he liked better than his own wife. They have always been a bad, wicked race," added Jeannette, "but their only illnesses were those brought on by their own wicked will."

Mr. Osborne did not insist; he looked as if he would move on. Jeannette altered her tone, and said:

"As to the illness of Madame—that is quite another thing. Monsieur knows as well as I do what ails her."

Mr. Osborne paused in the act of moving, and fastened a piercing look on Jeannette's face; but he gave her no encouragement to proceed.

"If I thought Monsieur did not know," hesitatingly pursued Jeannette, "and that Madame would never learn it, I would tell him."

"You are to repeat nothing of what your mistress says to you," said Mr. Osborne, coldly, "not even to me."

"As if she had said anything to me," echoed Jeannette. "Why, she would die first. Ah! I have not forgotten when she was a little girl, and cut her foot by running, spite all I had told her, in the little brook in the orchard—Mademoiselle Adèle always had odd fancies. Ah! I have not forgotten that I found it out a week afterwards, by the stains of blood on her little white stocking, poor angel! Tell me anything, indeed! Even when I found her moaning on these very steps the other night, all she told me was to bid me hold my tongue, and never come near her again."

There is no denying that Mr. Osborne's curiosity was strangely roused; but pride, stronger than curiosity, would allow him to put no question. He walked on, Jeannette followed him.

"Ah, sir," she said, "do not be angry with me. I am but a servant; but remember that I received Mademoiselle Adèle in my arms when she was born, and that I love her like my own flesh and blood. For Heaven's sake! do not despise because it comes from old Jeannette, a warning that may save my dear young mistress a world of misery."

"I know you are a faithful servant, Jeannette," said Mr. Osborne, "and you are mistaken in supposing I should despise the words of a woman who reared my wife."

"Ay, but you will not ask what it is," a little indignantly thought Jeannette.

"Say what you have to say," pursued Mr. Osborne, "but be quick, I am in a hurry."

But Jeannette on being put to the proof, could not find her tongue. Mr. Osborne frowned.

"Well, what is it?" he asked, impatiently.

"Madame has a complaint which she will never tell a doctor," hesitatingly said Jeannette, "and for which all the waters of MÉRIGNY would not have done her much good."

"I do not read riddles," frigidly said Mr. Osborne; "you must speak plainly, or not at all."

Jeannette wrung her hands, and seemed strangely perturbed. At length it came out.

"Madame is fond of her husband," said Jeannette, reddening at having to talk of such things.

Mr. Osborne showed no sort of emotion. Jeannette saw this would not do. She closed her eyes and gasped forth,—

"And unfortunately Madame—Madame is jealous."

Mr. Osborne stood still like one enchanted; a burning glow overspread his whole face, but Jeannette did not see it. Without looking at him she turned into an alley and walked away.

Jealous! strange to say he had never for a moment thought of that, he had perplexed conjecture with wild and improbable imaginations; he had never questioned it concerning this truth. Jealous! she whom he had loved with strong and entire affection! Jealous of Alice, too! she whom, spite all her faults, he thought infinitely more attractive than Alice, with all her virtues. She whom even as her impartial friend he had admired with respect, but with tenderness too; she whom, as her husband, he had loved with a man's pride as well as with a lover's fondness. It was incredible, yet a hundred proofs thronged memory and confirmed it.

He felt touched, disturbed, offended, and mollified, too, in a moment. Her doubt offended him in his honour, her humility in his taste and his affection, but even when his wrath was rising, he remembered that this jealousy was the child of infinite love; his anger fell as strong winds grow still on summer noons; the sins of his wife fled from his memory, and keen, vivid, reproachful, his own rose and arraigned him, each a separate conscience, severe and upbraiding. Forbearance failing when it was most needed, duty perverted into harshness, love wronged by passionate denials became his accusers and his judges. He heard them all humbly enough, and offered but one plea. "I have been pitiless, but when have I not loved her first and entirely?" And even as the

thought rose within him she turned the angle of a path and stood before him in hesitating attitude, like one who knows that she shall not please by staying, yet who fears to offend by passing on.

He did not wish to explain, he did not wish to question; he did not wish for a scene, even a love scene; he did not want to make or receive reproaches, however tender; he loved, indeed, but he was a husband, and he had, like most men, strong ideas of a man's dignity and a husband's rights. Adèle was the darling of his heart, but she was his wife, too. He could not and he would not woo what he possessed, and especially when that being whom he owned loved him; but neither could he let that bitterness and that cloud remain one moment longer between them. He laid his hand on her shoulder, he looked down in her face conscious of his power indeed, yet humbly too.

"Adèle," he began.

She raised her finger, and smiled.

"Do not," she replied: "I know what you mean; it was my fault; I tried you too far."

He still looked down at her, very much surprised and very much moved at being read so soon and so quickly forgiven.

"I do believe you are one of the best of little girls," he said.

"Do not praise me," she exclaimed, looking alarmed, "or I shall straight do something wrong."

"If a man could say more than 'I am sorry' when he has erred," pursued Mr. Osborne, still looking at her, "I would not be niggardly in professions of regret, but I can find no better words than the plain words; no surer bond for the future than true sorrow for the past."

"I tell you it was all my fault," she cried, "I tried your patience too much."

"Child! what patience is that which will not bear the trial?" he asked, with some sadness. "Do you think that when I married you I thought myself wedded to sunshine and dew—I did not. I knew that marriage is holy and stainless, a sacrament in the church, a grave ordinance in society; I knew that, instituted by God in Eden, when man was sinless and woman had not been tempted, it had survived the Fall and the Curse, the only gift of Heaven, from which the blessing has never been taken away; yes, all this I knew, but I knew, too, that infirmity is the name of woman, spite all her tenderness and beauty; I knew that weakness is the name of man, spite all his strength and his native greatness. I prepared myself to endure as well as to love—to forbear as well as to cherish. Vain preparation! trifles have

exasperated me, things so slight that I scarcely remember them, could make me forget the generous indulgence of the man for the wayward nature of the woman, and the courtesy of the gentleman for the lady."

"Do not speak so," she said, "you pain me. I tell you again I tried you too much; but now I shall be good, truly good. Oh, you will see!"

She spoke with her old childish ardour, and in her eagerness she seized his hand and pressed it between both her own.

"You are the best of little girls," he said, again, "but if I were to ask you to go to M^érigny—"

"But you will not," she interrupted, with a secure smile, on which followed a joyous laugh.

Strange change! yet not more strange than complete; her eyes had their old light; her cheek had its early bloom; she looked a little worn, perhaps, but no more.

"Strange little creature," he said, smiling; "well, where are you running away? Are you not coming upstairs with me?"

Adèle was already at some distance from him; she turned round gaily.

"By and bye," she said, "by and bye."

She allowed him to ascend alone the steps that led to the conservatory, and thence to the saloon. She entered that room adjoining her husband's study, which had now become her room. She wanted to be glad alone, to rejoice for a moment in the fullness of her heart. She sank down on a chair; she surrendered herself to a strange tumultuous joy. Mr. Osborne was one of those men who say things once or twice in a lifetime, and hold fast to them for ever; yet complete had been his retractation, complete in aspect as well as in speech; never had he looked at her with more friendly affection than he had looked at her a quarter of an hour before in the garden. His aspect expressed not half so much penitence as tenderness, deep and true; penitence would have moved her, "but not like that," thought Adèle, "not like that."

She started up. She was romantic, not sentimental. She had keen, ardent feelings, but she could not linger over emotion, and even through all her joy there now shot a feminine feeling. "How do I look?" The glass gave response: she looked well.

The wish of paying some attention to her toilet awoke after a week's slumber. She smoothed her hair; she gave her attire a new aspect; she would have liked to metamorphose her whole being. Having done all she could she ran up to the saloon—for the last three evenings she had not been seen there.

Evening had set in; the chandelier was lit; the windows were open; a balmy breeze, perfumed with the flowers from the conservatory, filled the room. At the further end, sitting by the window they liked, Adèle saw Alice and her husband. In a moment, without power or thought of resistance on her part, jealousy returned and filled her heart. It had fled when the deeper grief had come, and now that grief was gone it returned triumphant.

She sat down breathless near the door. At once Mrs. Osborne was by her.

"I am so glad," she murmured. "How well you look! I have heard from Anna. Do you know, I do not think the waters of Mèrigny would have done you much good. They so often affect the wrong nerves. My sister-in-law—I mean my first husband's sister—went to Mèrigny for a pain in her side. Would you believe that she lost the use of an eye?"

"How fortunate!" replied Adèle, looking at her husband, who had not seen her.

"Fortunate, my dear! I am telling you that she lost the use of an eye—of her right eye—no, by the way, it was the left."

"How sad!" said Adèle.

Mr. Osborne had seen her, but continued his discourse with Alice.

"Sad for her, indeed; for the consequence of this change in her personal attractions—she had had beautiful eyes—was that her husband's love lessened, and finally vanished. What is it, my dear?"

It was Isabella who somewhat imperiously claimed her mother's attention. She said a few words which Adèle did not heed; Mrs. Osborne rose, and with an apology left her daughter-in-law.

Mr. Osborne was incapable of the ungenerous and ungentlemanlike weakness of wilfully exciting his wife's jealousy; but the opportunity he had not sought came; he saw Adèle look at him and Alice very strangely, and he could not resist the craving desire of knowing how far the rebellious girl who had wished herself dead a month after their marriage was now at his mercy. He spoke to Alice, but he looked in a side way she could not detect or observe at his wife. He saw her lend a divided attention to his stepmother's speech, whilst her eyes never left him and her friend; he could even read on her troubled face, vainly smiling, the torment of one who hears with thoughts far away from hearing words that sound distant and dull. But Mrs. Osborne was called away; Adèle remained alone by the table near which she

sat. She leaned her elbow on it; her hand shaded her brow, but not her fixed intent eyes. Her other hand turned the pages of the book of engravings, and once he saw it fall listlessly by her side, and he saw, or imagined that he saw—for the room was large, and they were not very near—her pale lips quiver, and something pass over her whole aspect like a silent despair.

And what did he feel then? Was it gratified love or gratified pride? Perhaps it was something partaking of both—something between tenderness and revenge, that made it sweeter to be thus despairingly loved when he had grown estranged and cold, than when he first poured forth all his fondness at the feet of a careless and wayward heart. He had grown suddenly silent; Madame Lascours spoke; he did not hear, he did not answer. She gave him a surprised glance; she saw him look at his pale wife, whose averted face remained unconscious of the look. Alice saw his dark eyes beaming with triumph and exultation; she saw the light but unusual glow on his cheek, the proud and happy smile that played around his handsome mouth, and with a beating heart, through which there ran a thrill of pain that was neither jealousy nor love, but the memory of both, she, too, read a story she had not read before.

"I believe you were speaking?" said Mr. Osborne, whose ear now recollected the sounds it had not heeded; and he turned to her, still smiling.

Alice, too, smiled, and looked up at him sadly. "I thought you generous," she thought, "and you are not. The man who likes to torment what he loves is still strong in you."

"I was saying," she observed aloud, "that Adèle looks very ill to-night."

A sudden cloud passed over his face; with a troubled and half-repentant aspect he turned towards the spot where his wife sat, but her chair by the table was vacant. Unable to bear more, she had left the room. Alice rose.

"Excuse me," she said to Mr. Osborne, "I have not seen Adèle to-day. I wish to speak to her."

He let her go. "She must know all—once for all she must know it," thought Madame Lascours. She went to the room of Adèle, but it was vacant; she looked in the Hall, but Adèle was not there; she returned to the drawing-room, and found no one there save Isabella sitting sullen, silent, and alone. "She, too, has her cross to bear," thought Madame Lascours, resuming her place; "who has not, on this sad earth—who has not? They who might be blest seek their own torment. Where is Adèle now? mourning for imaginary sorrows!"

Adèle was in the garden lying on the steps that led to the lake, telling to the night her sad lament, not in speech, indeed, but in piteous tears and broken moans. Alas! it was ever the same story; she could not bear it; it was something beyond endurance—a suffering too keen, a torment too pitiless. “Oh, to die!” she thought, “to die, and be at rest.” Her despair had reached its height; the gloom of that starless night, the cool depths of those waters which she heard but did not see, tempted her. “Ah, if it could be done without my doing it,” she thought, “it would be well. If that deadly water could come to me, and I not go to it, it would be well; for then it would be done, and without sin.” “Ah, would it be well indeed?” asked stern Conscience; “are you so very fit to appear before your Maker—your God—a jealous God, as he has told you, you whose heart is the temple of a human idol? Ah, foolish girl, call not for death, say not ‘let me be loved, or let me die;’ say rather to Sorrow—‘Welcome, thrice welcome, thou messenger of the Almighty’s mercy, thou blessed chastiser of the human heart, thou severe but sacred purifier of human affections.’”

“I cannot, I cannot!” cried Adèle, answering that ruthless voice, “God gave him to me, and bade me love him; and there are not two ways of loving. He is my husband; I am his wife—I belong to him; and not to love my master would be the degrading bondage of a slave indeed. Speak thus to the unwedded and the free, but never tell a woman not to love the man to whose days her days are bound for ever; never forbid the wife to love her husband. What, live with him, and not love him? Ah, you are mad!” she said, answering that unknown, unseen antagonist; “you have no husband; you do not know what you say.” And with that indignant answer came the thought of what marriage is or can be—of all that her wedded life was not; and again she wrung her hands with passionate despair; again she wept. Suddenly she started to her feet.

“Jeannette,” she cried angrily; “did I not tell you, once for all, not to come here?”

“Well, but I am not Jeannette,” said the voice of Mr. Osborne, and foreseeing that she would attempt to escape, his hand held her arm securely.

Adèle felt as if she would have liked to jump into the lake, for sobs and tears which she could not repress broke with passionate lament from her heaving bosom and disturbed the stillness of the night.

“Ah! let me go,” she cried at length; “let me go! You

know very well that you do not like me. Why then come to me here as if you did? I tell you I cannot bear this kindness, which always looks like love, and is not; which springs from a delicacy that would not wound, from a duty that would not grieve, and never from love. Hate me if you like, but do not pretend to like me."

She leaned her head on the stone balustrade and sobbed bitterly.

"Child," he said, gently, "what ails you?"

"Child! I am not a child! I was a child when you married me—but, ah! I am not a child now. I am, God help me, a miserable woman, wretched amongst the wretched; I am a wife whom her husband does not love."

He did not speak. He had no wish to check her reproaches.

"You cannot say you do," she persisted; "you know you cannot."

She paused; no justification passed his lips. Her soul rose; it was as if a storm had seized her whole being.

"You ask what ails me!" she said. "Ah! you know very well what ails me. Did you not triumph over my folly the other day in the study? did you not taunt me with it in the Maze, and dare me to deny it? did you not, an hour ago, secure of your power, make me confess myself but too happy and too glad to be received once more into grace? And now you ask what ails me! I will tell it to you. Whether you like it or not, I will tell it to you. What ails me is, that I love you very much, and that you love me very little. What ails me is, that this life and the next do not seem too long for that love to me; and that night and morning—ay, with all your kindness—you lament the day when Adèle became your wife. Ah! why did you marry me? I was fond of my friend, and my friend was fond of me—and now my friend is gone—and where is my husband? I did not ask you for love then—I could have lived years in this house with you, and never have dreamed of that; but now—but now to be your wife, and not to be loved, is more than I can bear—it kills me—it makes me die."

Desolate and heart-broken indeed rose her childish voice—voice too young to tell in such passionate language, such passionate sorrows. The sky had cleared; from behind white mists the yellow moon looked down with a veiled light upon them both. Mr. Osborne stood leaning on the stone balustrade, and he was silent and pale as death. The reproaches of his wife overwhelmed him—not because they were just, for they were unreasonable, un-

just, wild,—but because they told him what depths of woe had been sounded in that young heart; to what torment love for him had brought the once careless girl. Speak he could not, but spite her resistance, he took her in his arms, and spite all she could do, he kissed her face, on which her own tears would not let him feel **Mr.**

“Perhaps you cannot help it,” she said in a subdued voice; “I know you did not marry me for love. But still—but still—you might have liked me. I am not worth much—true—but you took me not from the hand of man—you took me from the hand of God, and for the sake of the Giver the gift might have been dear. Ah! remember—remember our marriage morning. Remember the blessing that was called down upon us—remember what we promised. Remember that you were told to love me as Christ loved His Church; remember that I was commanded to love you as that Church must ever love that heavenly Bridegroom. You were not told to be kind to me, you were told to love me—to be fond of me. And do you think,” she added, breaking off from pathos into petulance, and vainly trying to free herself from his arms with a childish abruptness, for which he liked her none the less, though he resisted it; “do you think I am going to be cheated in that fashion, and to take a kiss and a kind word for the love a man can give to his wife? No, sir,” she added, with some passion; “no—I will be all to you, all that a woman can be to her husband—or I will be nothing.”

But as she uttered the last fatal word, her heart failed her, her head sank on her bosom, her arms fell powerless by her side; weak, speechless, submissive, like a wilful child whose passion is all exhausted, she let him bear her away, place her on a bench, and sit there by her.

Mr. Osborne felt strangely perplexed. Delicate and proud, spite all her daring and her frankness, Adèle had disdained to utter the name of her friend, to sully it with a breath or insult him with a doubt. Her silence touched and embarrassed him. To answer passion with passion, reproaches with lover-like protestations, were things impossible to his reserve and his pride; and to say the truth, he felt just then inclined to nothing so much as to chide this provoking girl, who, first by her indifference, and then by her love, had, for the last six months, been his torment.

“I declare,” he cried, with some anger, “there never was so perverse a little creature. Adèle, Adèle, you are as tender and as sweet as a rose on a briar; but woe be to him who touches you—he will be pitilessly pricked; woe be to him who would like to gather so

dangerous a blossom—it will make him bleed daily; it will be the delight of every sense, the charm of his eyes, and the torment of his heart."

Adèle bent forward and looked in his face; he smiled with some bitterness.

"You will see nothing new there," he said, rather sharply.

"Once for all, if you like me, tell me so," she cried.

"Do you think me capable of a lie?" he asked.

The question roused her strangely.

"God forbid!" she cried, "God forbid."

"Well, then, once for all, once for ever, I like you."

He pressed her to his heart with a fervour, he spoke with a vehement simplicity that would have convinced one less willing to be convinced. She believed him with her whole soul, with her whole heart she believed him, and mute joy invaded and possessed her whole being.

"Ah, God is good!" she cried at length, with a burst of triumphant gladness that showed Mr. Osborne, far better than her kneeling prayers night and morning, how deep and true was set the Divine presence in the heart of his young wife; "and how wicked I have been, but I shall be good now."

"Humph! we shall see that," he could not help saying, with a touch of that irony which ever came uppermost.

"Precisely," she said, shortly, "just as I shall find out whether you really do like me or not. Oh! but I am so happy," she cried with a suddenness that pleased him well, it was so joyous; "so very happy! If I could only make you feel and understand it—but I never could. Ah! one can tell grief, yes, but joy, but happiness, never, never."

She hid her face in her hands and laid her head on his shoulder; and whilst he clasped her there, the silence of happiness fell around them. He, too, spoke no more. There is a charm in the stillness that is conscious of sight, sound, and all surrounding things, and this charm they both felt in its fulness.

Her soul felt wrapped in a religious shadow. She had been foolish, proud, rebellious, despairing—and gentle, benignant Providence had rewarded her sins with unmerited blessings. "I have not deserved it," she thought; "oh no, I have not," and then came a consoling, though humbling thought; "what do we ever deserve? What is there that is not the gift of a bounty both royal and divine?"

He too thought, "How unwisely if I could I would have shaped my course; in solitary, purposeless wanderings, in single and selfish joys!"

Solitude, liberty, wandering, faded into the past ; without sorrow he saw them go ; with a smile he bade them farewell. For they left behind them in the silence and half gloom of that soft May night, a young wife whom he loved, a beating heart which he could grieve or bless : Empire so sweet to the tenderness, so dear to the pride of man, that he rarely holds it too dearly bought.

CHAPTER XLIX.

HAPPY HOURS.

"Is there in this wide world a happier creature than I am to-day ?" thought Adèle, as holding Lilian's hand, she ran down with her the sunny, broad alley. "Ah, no, there is not, there is not." The words rang in her heart like the burden of a joyful song. The morning was fresh and bright ; the child laughed as she ran with childish glee, and her young stepmother, almost as much a child, laughed from the fulness of a happy heart. Mr. Osborne was returning from the counting-house when he met them both. He was not a domestic man, but as they paused before him, as he rested his right hand on the shoulder of his blooming young wife, as he laid his hand on the head of his little girl, he thought that a woman and a child were beautiful things in a human home. Lilian soon ran away ; whilst she played on the path before them, they slowly walked to the house.

"Ah, what a lovely morning," cried Adèle.

"And what a lovely thing a happy face is," he thought, looking down at her with a fond smile.

Her raised look sought his bent gaze. Serene happiness shone on his handsome face ; serene joy beamed in her aspect, fresh and fair as beauty at seventeen. For a moment they looked at one another with mingled fondness and pride, each pleased to love what each admired. He smiled at her look, which he knew how to read ; she slightly reddened at his gaze, which she understood.

"Where have you been so early ?" she asked.

"To the counting-house."

"And what have you been doing there ?"

"Locking it up."

"I am glad—right glad ; but what will you do now that you have nothing to do ?"

"I shall finish the rebuilding of Courcelles."

"You cannot be rebuilding for ever."

"Perhaps I shall turn pastoral, and feed sheep. Perhaps I shall turn agricultural, and grow corn; and perhaps I shall do nothing, or, what comes to the same, make love."

Adèle laughed gaily; a light sound disturbed that merry mood. She turned round. Isabella stood by them in the path; with a stern smile she passed on.

"She is going in to breakfast," said Adèle; "shall we go in too?"

"You are in a great hurry," he replied; "sit down here a while with me."

They sat down in an arbour, and Mr. Osborne spoke to his wife not of love nor of anything like it, but of Courcelles and the changes he contemplated making in it; of a journey they were to take together that autumn, of a governess for Lillian, of a fortunate turn his private affairs had taken, and a rise in certain shares which doubled his income. In short, for the first time he was confidential and communicative; and as his arm was resting on the back of the wooden bench behind her, and he was all the time smoking an excellent cigar, and felt both comfortable and happy, and comfort is a wonderful addition to happiness, it is no wonder that he forgot breakfast time.

Mrs. Osborne sat in the Hall admonishing Isabella, whom her morning walk had not enlivened. Sad and rigid had been the young girl's face since the De Launays had left. Mrs. Osborne was not a tender or an affectionate mother, but she was not either without the feelings of nature. She felt concerned for Isabella.

"My dear," she said, half kindly, half remonstratively, "you are wrong—very wrong; you are eighteen, you are handsome, well educated, well born—think of all that."

"And what good will it do me?" asked Isabella, moodily.

"My love, try and imagine first that such a person as Monsieur de Launay never existed. I have too much faith in your good sense to suppose that your affections were deeply engaged."

"I liked him," said Isabella.

"My love!" cried Mrs. Osborne.

"Yes, laugh at me, despise me—I know I deserve it all," exclaimed her daughter, with much emotion, "but I liked him. I laughed at him, I meant to make a tool of him,—to marry him, indeed, but to use him, and instead of that he made use of me. He gave me up coolly and calmly, like a bad bargain, and I—night and day I torment myself because it is all over—because, worthless as he is, I cannot have him."

She laid her head on the table and cried passionately.

"My dear," said Mrs. Osborne gravely, "this alters the case quite. If you like him, have him, by all means."

Isabella looked up amazed. Mrs. Osborne smiled.

"My dear, you cannot be so ignorant of your own power as to think that unless Monsieur de Launay marries some one else off-hand, he can resist you."

"Ah, bah!" disdainfully said Isabella, "he did not like me."

"I perceive from this that you do like him, or you would not be so blind. He admired and liked you as much as a man who likes and admires himself can admire and like a woman."

"He admired Adèle much more than he admired me," said Isabella, with lurking jealousy.

"Indeed he did not; he could not. Mind, I do not say that before he saw you, he did not admire Adèle, knowing, too, that she had a fortune; but after you and he met, certainly not—certainly not."

She spoke confidently, and spoke as she felt. Isabella had inherited her mother's charms; and Mrs. Osborne could not think lightly of the commanding figure and blooming beauty she had transmitted to her daughter. Isabella reddened a little, but why not say it? she felt rather comforted.

"The only difficulty," pursued Mrs. Osborne, "is to see him. He is in Paris, I believe; to go there alone would not accomplish our object. William must take us; he must have an establishment; I know that he has been a considerable gainer in railway speculations of late. We must make him part with Courcelles, which is a useless sort of lumber, and take a pretty little hotel in Paris. Madame de Launay never accompanies her nephew. We can meet him by chance at first, your beauty will do the rest. Let him only feel that you regret him."

"I cannot," interrupted Isabella.

"Well, my dear, please yourself; but I can assure you no man can resist *that*."

Mrs. Osborne was a case in point; she had won her first husband by no other magic. She was handsome, and he admired her until he learned she had no fortune. He then cooled down; but a fit of illness, brought on by regret for his loss, soon placed him, a hard man of the world, however, helpless at her feet. Mrs. Osborne could not doubt that the same magic would work equally well with the Baron; but it was not necessary that Isabella should be her own betrayer. Her mother could do it for her infinitely better than Isabella could do it herself. Mrs. Osborne already with

the mind's eye saw the devoted Baron's start and rapid blush : already she heard his murmured—" Ah, Madame ! " with something about the angelic goodness of Isabella, and a more or less passionate protestation that he would live and die for the fair lady who honoured him thus far. Nor were her visions all maternal. It tickled her fancy to triumph slyly over that too artful lady Madame de Launay, and make her nephew marry without a *sou* the same woman whom he could have had with a fortune, moderate, indeed, but better than none. It flattered her restless though well-hidden ambition, to feel power within her grasp, and rule that rebellious William who had baffled her so long, and who was now so softly entering her nets. But Isabella's temper had ruined many a plan well laid, well matured before this day. Somewhat anxiously she turned to her daughter, and said—

" Isabella, I will carry this matter through, but on one condition—you must not interfere. Whatever you hear, whatever you see—hear and see, but do not meddle. On that condition, and on that only, will I promise that you shall be Monsieur de Launay's wife."

Isabella had never been a very humble daughter ; but love can humble the proudest hearts. There was a struggle between passion and pride : love prevailed : the promise was given. " I leave all to you," she said.

" You will not repent it ; my love for you and my experience—how very late William and his wife are ; the coffee will be cold.—Here they are."

The door opened, and Madame Lascours entered, but neither William nor his wife appeared. Mrs. Osborne gave Alice a cool, patronizing nod, and blandly inquired if she had seen the two truants. Madame Lascours looked surprised. Had not Mrs. Osborne received the message entrusted to Jeannette for her ?

" I have received no message," said Mrs. Osborne gravely.

" Then Monsieur Osborne will be very sorry to have kept you waiting. He is breakfasting with Adèle in the garden."

Mrs. Osborne poured out the coffee without a word, and without a word, when the meal was over, she rose and walked into the garden. They had not done breakfast yet ; they were still sitting in the arbour, with a low round table near them, and Lillian standing by it, and making excursions into a plate of biscuits. Adèle had finished her meal, and was amusing herself with teasing her husband, who was more slow. He stretched out his hand for sugar, and the basin vanished behind her back. His spoon, his knife, his bread and his butter deserted him, and he only smiled at the mischievous elf.

"I cannot vex you," she said, at length.

"No, indeed, you cannot. I have no weak point."

Adèle shook her head sceptically.

"You look at your whiskers," she said, "and if you should find one off to-morrow morning, what would you do?"

"I should take off the other by all means."

"You would not be vexed?"

"Why should I?"

"You know well enough you are safe," demurely replied Adèle, softly patting his cheek; "how could I have the heart to deprive you of so remarkable an ornament."

Mr. Osborne put down his cup, and looked at his wife with solemn gravity.

"Something very remarkable ails you this morning," he said; "I confess I cannot imagine what it is. Do you know, Lilian?"

Lilian's mouth was too full for her to answer the appeal. Mrs. Osborne, whom they had not perceived, gave the reply,—

"Our dear Adèle is in good spirits," she said, graciously.

She gave Adèle an inquisitorial look which made William's wife redden. She had a nervous consciousness that Mrs. Osborne's blue eyes were reading her through. The most innocent affection, the purest happiness, have their mysteries. She started to her feet, and petulantly exclaiming,—

"Oh, you are too long, I cannot wait for you," she ran away, and left her stepmother and her husband together.

At the corner of an alley she met Alice; she stopped rather out of breath, and looked with surprise at her friend. Madame Lascours was in walking attire.

"You are going out?" said Adèle.

"I am going away."

"Why so?"

"My cousin wants me, and you do not."

"Yes I do."

"No, child, you do not."

"Well, then, Monsieur Osborne wants you for that business, you know. Stay, Alice, stay."

Her entreaties were all the more pressing that conscience pricked her for having wronged them both. Alice looked down at her, and laid one hand on her shoulder, and clasped her other hand tenderly, and smiled at her flushed face.

"How pretty you look this morning," she said; "no wonder his eyes cannot get tired of your happy face; he might look far and wide and not see another like it."

Adèle gave her a surprised glance; then renewed her entreaties.

"Stay," she said, again and again.

But "I cannot," was the invariable reply of Alice.

"I cannot. This is not, and must not be my home; Monsieur Osborne will have the kindness to see to my affairs without my presence, and Madame Gérard feels lonely and wants me. I must go, but before I go, Adèle, I must tell you something. Monsieur Osborne is too proud to speak of me to you, and others might do it and not tell the truth. Indeed, how could they; he and I alone know what passed in this house between us nine years ago."

"No—no, do not tell me," stammered Adèle; "perhaps he does not wish me to know."

"He can have no such wish—unless for my sake, and if I choose to inflict on myself the mortification, how can he object?"

Adèle was silent. Alice proceeded,—

"Nine years ago I was seventeen, and Monsieur Osborne was twenty-one, and unmarried. We met in this house; he had come to see his father; mine had not long been dead; my mother was with me. She told me one day that she and Monsieur Osborne, the elder, had agreed that I and his son should marry. I did not object—how could I?—he was all that a girl of my age could desire. He seemed to like me, too; we were thrown very much together, and he rather sought than shunned me. He never spoke of love, indeed, but what was I to think? One day he was missing—two days, and three, and an entire week passed, and he did not return; there was a gloom in the house; my mother was anxious; his father was dark. At length the truth came out—they had pledged him without his knowledge, and when ordered by his father to marry me, he indignantly refused. He did not like me, and he would not have me. He left the house and parted from his father in anger—they never met again—I was the cause of the estrangement. God forgive me if I judge wrongly, when I think that this marriage had been put into his father's head by his father's wife, for the very purpose of causing that estrangement. Well, you know all, now! Monsieur Osborne wrote me an honest and manly letter in his own justification. I answered, to tell him that I held him free from all blame. He married his cousin, I married Monsieur Lascours, and the world said that we had loved and been thwarted by our parents—it blamed me for infidelity, and pitied him for having had so inconstant a mistress. That is all, Adèle."

She had spoken very simply, and she looked calm and unmoved as she ceased; no flush of emotion had lit her cheek; no sad or fitful light had kindled her eyes.

She had said it truly; the cold water in the cold well was not colder than her heart. Adèle could not speak. She felt ashamed of having been jealous; ashamed of being happy and beloved; moved to the very heart, yet without a word to say, save a vehement—

“Good-bye, Alice, and God bless you.”

“Good-bye, Adèle.”

She stooped, kissed her, and went. And Adèle, still surprised and perturbed, let her go, and remained in the alley, standing there mute and wondering at the fact she yet could not understand; how Mr. Osborne had never loved Alice, and could love her.

Madame Lascours found her host in the Hall, with his step-mother and his sister. With surprise and concern he heard that she was going; he pressed her to stay, and was gently, but so firmly refused, that he desisted from his entreaties. Then he said that he would accompany her home, for Madame Gérard did not live more than a mile and a-half away. Alice looked distressed, and entreated him not to do so.

“But, I am sure Adèle would like to join us,” he urged.

“Let me go away alone,” she entreated.

At once he was silent; but to his surprise, and to that of Alice too, Isabella now spoke.

“You are in a great hurry to leave us,” she said.

Her tone was almost cordial, her aspect was almost gay. Ten years of care and bitterness had faded from her face. Madame Lascours looked at her with astonishment, and from her she looked to Mrs. Osborne.

The look won no response; Mrs. Osborne was sitting straight on a chair, with a cold, grey face, on which sullen and stern disappointment was written.

“Yes, is it not a shame, Isabella?” said a light, gay voice, and a blooming face appeared under the arm of Alice, which a small hand raised gently. Adèle had recovered her wits, and had come to bid her friend another adieu. But though Alice smiled, her purpose was not altered. She kissed Adèle, she gave her hand to Mr. Osborne and Isabella; she bowed to Mrs. Osborne, and she was gone.

“Oh! what shall I do without her?” cried Adèle, making a great effort not to cry.

Isabella gave her a look, which, for once, was more kindly than ironical. If Monsieur de Launay had really slighted Adèle for her sake, she could really feel benevolently towards Adèle.

"Your wife has a warm heart," she said to her brother William.

"But I cannot let you cry," said Mr. Osborne, sitting down by his wife, who was now fairly in tears; he smiled at her grief, even though he wiped her wet cheek with his handkerchief.

Adèle laughed, and, looking up at Isabella, she said:

"He is so kind!"

"Oh! what a pair of turtles!" cried Miss Osborne, with good-humoured irony. "You cry because your friend is going, and you are an angel; he lends you his handkerchief, and *he* is an angel. I wonder you do not get tired of it."

"Oh! we have a little variety now and then," said Mr. Osborne, rather drily; "have we not, Adèle?"

Their looks met consciously. Miss Osborne sat down and said, "Oh, dear!" and forgot them to think of Augusta. She was eighteen, sanguine, and not so very deeply in love as to cherish the despondent mood for its own sake.

Mrs. Osborne sat in her chair, rigid, motionless, and she looked at Mr. Osborne sitting by his wife, in a window, and talking to her in low tones, with a dark and sullen eye. Their reconciliation, their fondness had dethroned her. Her rule was over; her schemes were dashed to the earth like broken Dagon's and senseless Baals.

Once more she was nothing and no one, or rather she was the mother of Robert, the dishonoured fugitive; she was the mother of Isabella, the slighted or rejected girl; she was the owner of one hundred and seventy pounds a-year. At the very moment when she thought herself most sure of him, William Osborne had slipped through her strong grasp. And, with a galling unconsciousness of his offence, he had that morning asked her to rejoice over the restored health of his wife; with provoking insolence he allowed her and every one who liked to see that he was the first humble servant of the little and beloved mistress of Courcelles.

CHAPTER L.

ONE DAY.

THE sun is up ; bright, joyous, ardent, he hangs self-poised above a mountain peak, and ascends the pale sky of early morning. And with the sun, as eager to fill her race, as joyous in her happy youth, Adèle has arisen.

She has a great deal to do to-day, as, indeed, she has every day. Every hour that sun will measure before he sets red and burning behind the dark fringe of the western mountain, is full for Adèle, full of tasks self-appointed, all pleasing, and some delightful.

Young wives have various ways of showing that they are happy women. Some oo like doves, some frolic like kittens ; but he must be rather a dreamy man that can bear cooing the whole day long ; and it must be a wonderfully amiable kitten that never gives a scratch. Young wives who would not be thought a bore or a nuisance—and we appeal to the most enthusiastic lovers of the feline race, are not kittens a nuisance now and then ?—do not hang on the beloved ; do not be too playful either : do as Adèle did, take to housekeeping, and make him as comfortable as you can. You need not, like her, rise with the sun.

She likes that early hour. Joyful and light she glides down the silent staircase, where the sunbeams dance gaily on the dark, polished steps, or creep along the pannelled walls. Everywhere closed doors meet her ; everywhere she finds the stillness of morning and the repose of sleep. She enters a long passage, it leads her to the door of her husband's new sitting-room in the new part of the house. She enters it, a privilege which Jeannette alone shares with her mistress. It is a large room, vast and high, but cheerful, spite its sombre furniture ; deep are its chairs, broad its tables, where papers and books lie scattered, for Mr. Osborne is a careless man ; a solemn look have the bronze busts on their stands ; pale gleams of light shine back from the carved oak cabinet ; and yet it is a cheerful room, for Jeannette has left the windows open, that sunshine and air may enter ; the morning breeze plays with the long, sweeping curtains, and each window frames a different picture ; one of a lake where shadows are sleeping ; one of mountains where every slope is sunlit ; and one, the central window, of a verdant garden, with a glancing fountain ; its waters play in the sun and fall in white foam and with a pleasant

sound in a stone basin, around which bloom flowers of vivid hue, scarlet geraniums, yellow calceolaria, and delicate heliotrope. It is opposite this window that Mr. Osborne sits; and here, with diligent hand, Adèle repairs the disorder left behind by that untidy man. It is her first daily task; he never thanks her for it; perhaps he knows not that she does more than place the vase of flowers on his table, and to say the truth, Adèle does not care for thanks; she does that because she likes it, for no other reason. Yet for many reasons is that room dear to Adèle.

The housekeeping fit seized her one bright morning when her husband left Courcelles on one of his last business errands, and with the intimation that he might not return for three or four days. Adèle suddenly discovered that the house is a wonderful world to rule, and that, though she had done her duty, she had not yet done her best. With joyful enthusiasm and young ambition she seized her sceptre and entered on the government of her new empire. She began with a general survey of the house. Mr. Osborne had repaired the walls and the roof, but, true man as he was, he had stopped there, and left many a room cold and bare; other cares, other thoughts than the thought and the care of furnishing them had absorbed him, until he forgot them entirely. Adèle went through them with a pensive look, then suddenly turning to Jeannette, who stood behind her holding a bunch of keys, she said—

“Jeannette, there is a great deal of old furniture upstairs, is there not?”

“Yes, Madame, a great deal: the very furniture, too, that was in these rooms until Monsieur Osborne’s father sent it to the garret, and said it was only fit for that.”

The eyes of Adèle sparkled.

“Jeannette,” she cried, “we will bring it back; you will tell Jean to put it as it was formerly; yes, every chair shall be where it was sat on, every bed shall stand where it was slept in, a hundred years ago.”

“Ah, Madame,” said Jeannette, “it is very old.”

“Never mind its age; it will give a decent and venerable look to these bare rooms, which I hate.”

“Is Madame sure that Monsieur will not object?” dubiously suggested the old woman.

“Object!” echoed Adèle, seeming amused, “oh, no! he has told me once for all that I was Queen absolute within the house, so he must keep his word. Let us go at once.”

And at once they went along endless passages, up endless

staircases, until the lumber-rooms were reached. Adèle passed through them silently ; when she reached the last and largest, she paused, and leaning her cheek on her hand, she looked around her pensively. The sense of something sad and solemn came to her with the aspect of that decayed furniture, mouldering away neglected in that deserted room. Through dust-stained windows the sunshine streamed in, and fell in golden streaks on the dark and ancient floor. Before her rose a vast bed seven feet square, with massive pillars which branches of feathers crowned like a hearse ; wiry-legged chairs with the gilding all worn off the red wood, with the canvas of the worsted-work bare in patches, stood empty and melancholy in a group hard by. A bureau of marqueterie, where the once vivid red of the roses had faded into a tawny pink, still bore the traces of ancient ink ; the damask hung loose on the sofa ; the red velvet cushion yet showed where dainty feet had rested on it of yore ; it was as if generations had faded back into the past. And two rather shabby portraits who stood in a corner—one of a blooming beauty, with powdered hair and pink roses, the other of a fastidious-looking gentleman in blue velvet, with his white hand on the hilt of his sword, and who seemed to gaze at the world through weak, half-shut eyes, looked reproachfully at their descendant. “ Do you imagine,” they said, “ that we too did not love when we were in our prime ? That bed has received beauty in her bloom, and nursed her to happy slumbers and happy dreams ; on that mouldering bureau was written the prettily-worded and ill-spelt note which the happy lover kissed with transport, and wore near his heart at the battle of Fontenoy, that gallant battle, the last relic of chivalry, when foe bowed to foe with old courtesy, and yielded to his enemy the pleasure of firing first. Look at these chairs, they have received the rustling hoops and ample-tailed coats of a gay assembly ; that very cushion, on which a silky spaniel slept at the feet of his mistress, whilst her delicate fingers were busy in parfilage, and her ear listened to soft speech, ought to speak to you of the fleeting charm of beauty, of the perishable nature of love. Ah, foolish child ! renounce a transitory world, put a veil on your head, and enter a convent at once.”

“ But I cannot enter a convent ! ” promptly replied Adèle, amused at the internal dialogue. “ I am married ; and to punish you for giving me such an impertinent piece of advice, you shall all pack down at once, bed, sofa, cushion, portrait—all of you.”

So said, so done ; for *désir de femme*, says the old French proverb, *est un feu qui dévore*, and Adèle felt that she could

have no peace of mind or being until her wish was gratified. The furniture, when cleaned, mended, and repaired, proved to be better than Jeannette had thought, or than the late William Osborne had said; but he was a matter-of-fact man, who liked shining mahogany, clean carpets, bright fenders, and who hated antiquarian lumber; his son had other tastes, and though he was very sparing of praise when he returned, and whilst his wife's undertaking was in progress, he gave her the clearest proof of his approbation, when it was completed, by selecting one of the rooms she had thus restored to life for his own use.

Dear, therefore, is that room to Adèle, her first triumph ratified by her husband's choice and presence. There may be pride as well as love in the care she takes of it; and now having made it neat and nice, having placed every book where the hand she knows likes to find it, Adèle goes into the garden, and walks along the gravelled paths. She gathers the tallest roses where they hang all heavy with dew, and cover her face with sparkling drops; she runs into the grassy orchard, and fills the basket on her arm with the ripest fruit, before the heat of the sun shall have made it lose the delightful freshness of the night. The flowers are for his eye, the fruit is for his palate: it shall lie on green vine-leaves, on a cool porcelain plate, at his hand; for, true woman, Adèle likes to feed what she loves.

And now the sun is gaining strength; the Manor is astir; windows open, closing doors are heard; Adèle has barely time to hold a brief consultation with Jeannette, her major-domo, then runs up to her dressing-room, where Madame Leroy, who has returned from Méridy, majestically waits; by the time her toilet is over, breakfast too is waiting below, and Mrs. Osborne not quite so sweet as of yore, Isabella pale and silent, and Mr. Osborne and Adèle alone smiling and happy, are gathered together: Anna is still trying the benefit of the waters of Méridy, and Capitaine Joseph, who is on a visit to his "brother," breakfasts in his room.

The meal is over. Mr. Osborne goes to his sitting-room, and Adèle stands still and thinks of what she is to do? Shall she give a look at that jelly which Jeannette is preparing below—shall she, like the lady in the "Spectator," work a leaf in her handkerchief? Better the handkerchief than the jelly, for one can do without her and the other cannot, and the garden is delightful to work in. She takes out her work-basket, forgets her thimble, then her thread, then her scissors, and finally has to go back for the handkerchief itself. As she crosses the court it suddenly occurs to her that she

has not made Lilian read for these two days. The handkerchief must yield to Lilian, who is forthwith fetched, brought down, lured into the garden with a bright picture-book, and who, sitting in a shady arbour with her young stepmother, reads attentively for full five minutes. But at the end of that time, a bird singing in the tree makes Lilian look up. Adèle takes her to where there is no bird, and Lilian sees a boat on the lake and cannot read, and Adèle, who does not wish to scold, and who does not like to yield, feels bewildered and perplexed, until Mr. Osborne releases them both. It is his voice calling; he is standing at his window. He wants Adèle on business. The lesson is over joyously Lilian runs off to play with her *bonne*, and Adèle enters with a smile her husband's room. Every day she is called there, and it is long every day before the important business for which Mr. Osborne requires her presence is transacted. Letters to hunt for and refer to, accounts to make up, with occasional digressions, will take up time.

After business comes pleasure. Mr. Osborne thinks he would like a promenade on the lake: Adèle runs up to fetch her round hat, and comes back with Lilian. The lake is delightful, so cool, so silent; the boat glides along the still waters, and skirts a rugged shore. The arms of Adèle are clasped around Lilian, whose head has sunk on her stepmother's lap. Mr. Osborne looks at them both and smiles: the beautiful daughter, the more beautiful mother, the misquoted Horace of *Capitaine Joseph*, recur to him.

Glide on, happy boat, glide on for ever on a summer lake and never reach the shore of age or sorrow: thou bearest a freight more precious than the fortunes of Cæsar; thou bearest three happy hearts. Vain wish! Love but makes time seem more fleet; day is declining; red streaks of light dart across the lake, and sink in the gloom of its waters. The boat is slowly returning; the sun has set as it reaches the stone steps that lead to the garden, now grey and silent. Lights are shining in the dining-room; once more the family is gathered—*Capitaine Joseph* appears and kindly takes on himself the whole burden of the conversation—to break up again when the meal is over; but this time Adèle and her husband retire together to his sitting-room, where the lamp burns waiting for them, and the moon looks in shyly above the little fountain. They talk, they laugh, Adèle sings, and finally, Mr. Osborne takes up a book and reads; Adèle, sitting on a stool at his feet, listens for a while, as attentively as any Mary; but Mary had not been busy like Martha, or she could not have listened. Adèle, who has been both Martha and Mary to-day, who rose with

the sun and who is seventeen, feels very heavy. She leans her cheek on her hand, and allows her eyes to close; farther and farther sounds Mr. Osborne's voice. Adèle feels in a delightful state of reverie—she is not asleep, she is sure she is not; but suddenly Mr. Osborne's voice ceases; a great blank follows on dreamy thought; the head of Adèle has fallen heavily on her husband's knee; with a smile he lays down his book; Adèle is fast asleep.

We have given you, reader, the history of this one day, because, though so simple, it was a happy day, the last of its kind which Adèle was to know, the prelude to heavy and bitter trials, behind which the sun might shine indeed, but as in a cloud.

CHAPTER LI.

MONSIEUR DE LAUNAY'S LETTER.

"I wish I could cry," said Adèle, putting down her work.

Mr. Osborne, in whose room she was sitting, looked up with surprise from the letter he was writing.

"Cry! what for, child?" he asked.

"I do not know," she replied, disconsolately; "but I wish I could cry."

"And why can you not?" he inquired.

"Because I feel such a wish to laugh. It is very tiresome. I never felt so before. I laughed, I cried, but I never wished to do both."

"Do you feel dull—do you wish for anything?" he asked at once.

"No. I only wish I could cry, and as I cannot, I must even bear my unhappy fate."

She spoke with a sorrow so whimsical that he could not help smiling. He was going to suggest a walk in the garden—it was still too hot to venture on the lake—when, throwing down her work, Adèle discovered that it was that she disliked; then taking it up again, she perceived that she wanted some blue wool, in search of which she went at once. She left the room, and almost immediately afterwards she reappeared with a letter in her hand.

"What will you give me for it?" she asked, holding it up.

"Nothing," replied Mr. Osborne, dexterously snatching it from her.

"Very well," she petulantly replied; "wait till I bring you letters again."

And he saw with surprise that her eyes were dim. Mr. Osborne loved his young wife too much to tease her, and his tenderness was too indulgent for him to be displeased, even with a sorrow so childish. He kindly drew her towards him, and asked what ailed her. It was some time before she would confess; at length it came out, not without tears:

"I dreamed last night that you were dead."

"Well, but I am living," he said smiling.

"Ah! but you must die," said Adèle, passing her fingers through his dark curls, and looking down at him with fond regret: "You must die, and I cannot bear the thought."

"Of losing me," he interrupted. "Be comforted: an unerring presentiment, one of those presentiments that never deceive, assures me that I shall outlive you and marry a third wife, who will make me the happy father of nine lovely children."

"Take that from the second in waiting for the third and her nine children!" indignantly said Adèle, giving his hair a pull; and without waiting for the punishment that would infallibly have followed the audacious act, she sprang to the door, and merely giving him a brief look of triumph, she vanished.

Mr. Osborne broke the seal of his letter; but he had barely time to glance at the signature, when the door opened again, and Mrs. Osborne, passing in her head, said softly:

"May we come in?"

"By all means," courteously replied Mr. Osborne, rising.

The door opened wide. Mrs. Osborne, Isabella, and Capitaine Joseph entered.

"This is a very trying day," said Mrs. Osborne, sinking down in a chair. "Isabella, my love, are you not in a draught?"

"I like a draught," replied Isabella, with an unamiable sternness which had of late become habitual to her, and which gave a sort of tragic solemnity to her least words and slightest actions.

"Draughts are bad things," promptly said Capitaine Joseph. "William, I shall close that window with your permission."

Mr. Osborne assented; he foresaw a family explanation, and little as he relished it, he waited calmly. Capitaine Joseph shut the window, took a chair, put it between his legs as if it were a wooden horse, and meditatively leaning his chin on the sculptured back, he looked over at Mr. Osborne, and said impressively:

"William, those ladies feel dull."

"I am sorry to hear that," said Mr. Osborne.

"They think it is the country air."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, and they think, too, that a journey to Paris, with me, when my leave of absence is out, would do them good."

Mr. Osborne had wished for and anticipated this too long to show any surprise or testify any regret.

"I can see no objection to this Paris journey," he said, quietly; "Courcelles is dull, I confess it. That trust, moreover, which brought us all here, is over; if I stay it is because I have contracted a new tie and entered on a new life. There is no reason why I should bind by stepmother and my sister to my home and my existence. It is true that I am none the richer for the inheritance I received from my father; but my income has been doubled of late by unexpected good fortune. It is in my power, as it is my will, that those who are so near to me should lead a free and unfettered life; I will, since we have broached this rather delicate subject, take immediate steps to secure to Mrs. Osborne and her daughters"—he was addressing Capitaine Joseph—"an independence and a home, wherever they please."

Capitaine Joseph thought this very handsome, and said so; Mrs. Osborne murmured something about goodness and gratitude. Isabella was silent and surly. Mr. Osborne resumed:

"I have just received a letter from Monsieur de Launay; I have not read it; I do not suppose it can affect a matter that must have been considered well."

He spoke leisurely, and he looked at Mrs. Osborne as he spoke, for he was not without some secret suspicion that she had been busy underhand, but Mrs. Osborne only coughed, and said:

"Indeed!"

And Isabella haughtily asked:

"How can Monsieur de Launay's letter affect us?"

"My dear child, there is no knowing," put in her mother; "I have always thought that Monsieur de Launay's instincts were generous."

"He keeps them under excellent control though," observed Capitaine Joseph ironically.

"Well," said Mr. Osborne, giving the three a quiet look; "it remains to be proved that this is not the most common-place of business letters: very likely some old account which I have forgotten, with my usual want of memory, to settle." And glancing at the letter, which he still held, Mr. Osborne read aloud: "'My dear angel.' This really cannot be meant for me," he said, look-

ing up gravely; "Monsieur de Launay has committed a mistake in the direction."

He looked as he spoke at Isabella, who reddened.

"I did not know," pursued Mr. Osborne, rather seriously, "that you still corresponded with Monsieur de Launay. You are not wise, Isabella; but it is your own business."

He quietly handed the letter to her as to its legitimate possessor, but she pushed it away.

"I shall have nothing to do with it," she said, briefly.

"You are not wise," he repeated, with a displeasure free from anger.

Isabella looked very indignant.

"I beg," she said, haughtily, "that you will have the kindness to read that letter aloud and to the end. It will be more fair than to accuse and slander your sister in this fashion."

Mr. Osborne took up the letter and held it a moment in his hand, but he thought proper to comply with Isabella's request; and without comment he began again:

"My dear angel, why did I vainly wait for you last night?"

Mr. Osborne put down the letter and looked at Isabella with stern, angry eyes.

"What does this mean?" he asked in a low, subdued voice.

"Yes, what does it mean?" asked Capitaine Joseph, looking as fierce as any stage brother.

Isabella hid her face in her hands, and seemed unable to answer. Her mother looked with evident alarm at Mr. Osborne's face; it expressed deep and settled displeasure. After a pause, he read again:

"I walked about the garden three mortal hours, and heard midnight strike."

"Ah! it is too much!" exclaimed Mr. Osborne, crushing the letter in his hand, and rising in great indignation; "it is too much, Isabella, you try my patience too far. What! after all you know of that man, you hold a clandestine correspondence with him, you give him stolen meetings in a garden at night. He has the right to address you in this tone, the power of boasting of your imprudence; I tell you that it is too much."

By this Isabella had partly recovered. Proudly she looked up.

"I defy him," she said; "he can say nothing of me. He must be mad to write to me in that style now. I have been foolish, but it was long ago."

"Foolish!" interrupted Capitaine Joseph, who had with great

difficulty kept in so long. "Ma foi, I think that a young lady who gives private meetings is something more than foolish."

"Insult me, do!" cried Isabella, bursting into tears.

"And I sincerely pity her future husband," pitilessly continued Capitaine Joseph; "and I cannot help saying," he added, looking hard at his mamma, "that a little watching in the right quarter would have done no harm with so erratic a young lady. Locking her in at night, for instance, would not have been a useless precaution."

"You forget yourself, Joseph," gravely said Mrs. Osborne.

"Not in the least," phlegmatically replied her son; "I hate affairs of honour, and here is one out of which I cannot decently get. I shall most certainly have to call on Monsieur de Launay, and ask him to marry Isabella forthwith. No man," said Capitaine Joseph, giving his collar a pull and his moustache a twirl, "shall say that he had midnight meetings with a sister of mine, and get out of it so easily."

"Oh, pray let us have no tragedy," ironically observed Mr. Osborne.

Capitaine Joseph frowned.

"Monsieur Osborne," he said, "you cannot more than I do hold it an absurd law of society that ties the honour of man to so frail a thing as woman's discretion; but whilst society does hold that law and doctrine, there is but one course open to men, and that course I shall certainly adopt."

"You will oblige me by doing nothing of the kind," angrily exclaimed Isabella, "I am perfectly competent to protect myself; and I tell you again that Monsieur de Launay must be mad to write to me now in that tone. The only letter which I received from him since our parting I sent back unopened."

"Humph!" sceptically said Capitaine Joseph, "that remains to be proved. I will, in the meanwhile, with your permission, read this precious epistle to the end. It may help to make the matter a little clearer."

He took Monsieur de Launay's letter from the table where Mr. Osborne had indignantly cast it, and he began smoothing it leisurely. Isabella waited haughtily; her mother looked more attentive than uneasy, and Mr. Osborne seemed sick and weary of it all. He stood, indeed, in a listening attitude, but neither curiosity nor expectation disturbed the calmness of his handsome countenance. At length Capitaine Joseph began reading partly aloud, partly to himself.

"Hem! 'my dear angel,' hem! 'too cruel—ay, very cruel—

three mortal hours,'—hem ! 'but you did not come—did not find the opportunity, I suppose. I tell you that your godmother suspects nothing, and that Morel is a fool who does not see beyond the end of his nose.' What does he mean with his godmother and Morel ?" asked Capitaine Joseph, looking up. He saw three pale faces, but not one word was spoken. He resumed ; " 'I burn all your letters as you desire. Hard request to comply with, but you must be obeyed. I shall be to-night at the foot of the steps ; if you cannot come put a letter under the old stone. Adieu. You make me half mad with your strange perversity. How can you be so kind and so pitiless in a breath ? Ever yours, A. DE LAUNAY.'

"That is clear, though pitiless is out of place," said Capitaine Joseph, putting down the letter, and looking round. No one answered.

Isabella had risen. She stood, pale with wrath, in the centre of the room. Her eyes flashed, her lips quivered, but words could not pass them. Mrs. Osborne had remained calm, but she looked at her stepson with strange intentness. He stood by the table, leaning upon it with one hand ; the other hand was thrust in the bosom of his coat—he was rigidly pale, but collected.

"I knew they were two traitors," cried Isabella, pressing her forehead between her hands. "I knew it—I saw it—he and she. I tell you I saw it."

Mr. Osborne's look lit.

"You are raving," he cried, indignantly ; "that letter is an impudent forgery."

"A forgery !" cried Isabella, snatching it up, "a forgery ! I could swear he wrote it."

"Then it is an impudent slander !" exclaimed Mr. Osborne, more indignantly than before ; "a slander or a forgery, I repeat it. I care not which."

Isabella laughed bitterly.

"True, when the letter is for your sister she is upbraided as the most guilty of women—when your wife receives love letters, or gives midnight meetings, it is slander—it is forgery, of course."

Mr. Osborne's eyes burned with sombre fury.

"If it were not that you are mad with jealousy," he said, "I should resent your words as the deepest of insults. Even as it is, Isabella, never dare to speak so again. Never dare to hint that there is or that there can be a word of truth in this infamous accusation of an infamous foe."

He looked around him with a look defying denial. No one

replied. Isabella trembled with passion and resentment, but she did not dare to brave her brother. Capitaine Joseph, who now understood the matter, looked, as he felt, confounded, and stared in silent amazement. Mrs. Osborne coughed gently, and attempted conciliation.

"This is very unfortunate," she began, looking dubiously at her stepson, "very unfortunate!"

"I think nothing of it," he angrily interrupted.

"Oh, of course not!"

"And though I shall sift this matter to the bottom," he resumed, "it is for the sake of her honour, not for my own conviction, which nothing can shake. That Adèle never received this letter I need not say; that she was never meant to receive it, I here again aver. She was not merely incapable of holding clandestine meetings with any man, but there was that in her which even in her carelessness would have protected her for ever from an attempt so insolent. But as I said I shall sift this matter to the bottom; not for my own sake. I know that when I married her she brought me the innocence of a child, the purity of a girl, the modesty of a woman; but for her sake she shall be justified. Her word would be sufficient for me, but I will have more than her word," he added, looking round him; "I will have proof so clear that calumny shall sink back into night. In the meanwhile, I request—I desire—that not a word of this may reach my wife. I will not sully or trouble her mind with such accusations."

He ceased, and sat down. This was more than Isabella could bear. She gave him a look of mingled anger and scorn, and muttered audibly the words, "Miserable infatuation!" But Mr. Osborne fortunately did not hear her. Mrs. Osborne had risen. She looked collected, grave, and dignified. Her aspect, her whole manner, implied, "This is an important crisis—I know it, and am prepared to act my part in it," and in a serious and measured tone that suited her manner, she said,—

"William, this is too delicate a matter for me to utter a word, or attempt even well-meant interference. All I can say is this; if you need me, you can command me."

There was in her manner, in her look, in her very voice, a sort of reserve that brought the blood up to Mr. Osborne's cheek. It implied that Mrs. Osborne was too discreet to say anything, but that she thought a good deal; that she knew better than to interfere, but that she was quite aware her interference would in time be both needed and requested.

Half angrily Mr. Osborne would have thanked her for her offer, but have asked at the same time how he was likely to make it available, if at this precise moment the door had not opened, and Adèle had not entered the room with her blue wool in her hand. She gave a look of slight surprise at the group before her: for no one ever entered Mr. Osborne's room; and there was something, too, in the faces which she saw, that involuntarily struck her. But she had not time to dwell on their meaning. Isabella gave her sister-in-law an annihilating look, and sweeping past her, left the room. Adèle coloured, and turned to Mrs. Osborne.

"It is a very close day," observed that lady, in a remote tone, that implied she was very far away, and without looking at Adèle, or addressing any other remark to any one present, she bent her head and walked out too. Adèle looked dubiously at Capitaine Joseph, who alone looked and spoke as usual.

"Blooming as ever," he gallantly said; "fresh as the rose in your hair."

Adèle shook her head, and the rose she had put there in the morning fell on the floor at her feet. At once Capitaine Joseph picked it up and presented it to her with an air. She took it with a smile, and the smile seemed to Capitaine Joseph so sweet and so happy that his heart, which was a soft heart in the main, was touched. "Poor little thing!" he thought, "she is merry now, but how will it end?"

Capitaine Joseph disliked painful thoughts and feelings. He looked at his watch, and slapped his forehead.

"What! so late as that?" he cried; "I really must leave you," and giving his young sister-in-law a tender and pitying glance, he left her alone with her husband.

The door closed upon him. Adèle stood with her rose in her hand like one amazed and perplexed.

"What ailed Isabella!" she asked of Mr. Osborne.

"Do not mind Isabella, child."

"Oh, I do not mind her. I pity her. She has misery written in her face. You may be sure she was fond of him, but I do not think he can have been fond of her. Mrs. Osborne, too, looked strange, I thought, and even Capitaine Joseph did not seem quite as happy as usual. Has anything happened?"

He asked how she could put such a question.

"What ails them all?" she persisted, looking with a wondering smile up in her husband's face.

The dinner bell, ringing loud and clear, spared him the trouble of replying.

"So late!" cried Adèle; "would you have thought it was so late?"

Mr. Osborne did not answer—he had not heard her. With a clouded brow he was folding up Monsieur de Launay's letter, and putting it in his pocket. He did not see Adèle stealing softly behind him, he was not aware of her intent, until her light hand had snatched the letter from his. He turned round, red with involuntary displeasure. She laughed gaily, and holding the letter behind her back, she looked at him with sparkling eyes.

"I have got it back again," she said, merrily. "What will you give me for it now?"

Mr. Osborne bit his lip and tried to smile.

Poor Adèle little knew how sad was her jest, how ill-timed was her revenge to her husband. But he earnestly wished her to know nothing, and dreading lest she should catch a glimpse of that letter, or divine its contents, he tried, as we said, to smile, and asked what she wanted?

"Shall I get it?"

"Certainly!—that is to say, if you will at once restore my property," he added.

He spoke negligently, yet his wife noticed a sort of anxiety in his look. She placed the letter in his hand, and it seemed to her that he took it eagerly. Carefully he put it away in his pocket-book, and carefully he placed his pocket-book in his safest pocket.

"What is that letter about?" she asked, curiously.

"Tell me, rather, what ransom you exact for your captive, little pirate?" he replied.

"I want Lilian to dine with us to-day; she asked me, and I said—'Yes, if you would.'"

Mr. Osborne's brow cleared; he was pleased with the request; the presence of Lilian would spare some awkwardness at the dinner-table. He looked kindly at his young wife.

"I wondered if you were asking anything for yourself," he said, "that would be unlike you."

"You leave me nothing to ask for," she replied; "you make me, as you said you would, the happiest little lady in Courcelles."

She spoke simply, yet with the earnestness of grateful affection. She loving another man before she had loved him; she holding midnight meetings with a lover! He derided the insolent thought. His outstretched arm drew her gently towards him;

and, fondly he pressed her to his heart, and with avenging tenderness he kissed her. His looks were kind, and kinder still were his caresses; yet, as Adèle looked in his eyes, she felt vaguely that something ailed him; as she gazed in his face she saw that it was not the same face she had gazed on that morning.

"What was there in that letter?" she asked, softly.

"Oh, nothing!" he carelessly replied; and withdrawing from her, he asked if it were not time to go to dinner. Again his brow had become clouded. Adèle stood where he had left her, looking at him very earnestly. She felt what she had not felt for a long time, that a secret divided her from her husband. She put no more questions, but she fell into a long, deep dream.

"And Lillian?" said Mr. Osborne, suddenly turning round.

"I shall go for her," abstractedly replied Adèle; but even as she closed the door, she thought—"what can there have been in that letter?"

Isabella was alone in the Hall when Mr. Osborne entered it. She stood leaning against the marble mantelpiece, pale and sullen; her whole aspect alarmed her brother. That Mrs. Osborne or Capitaine Joseph would speak to Adèle he did not apprehend; but Isabella was amenable to no control, and just then she looked equal to anything. He went up to her.

"Isabella," he said, impressively, "you will not forget that Adèle is to know nothing."

He laid some stress on the last word, and his hand lightly pressed her arm as he spoke. She bent her haughty head, and smiled without looking at him.

"You shall be obeyed," she replied.

"I pity you," said Mr. Osborne.

"And I pity you!" she retorted; "for you were blind, and I was not. You saw nothing," she added, looking moodily at him; "I saw it from the day when standing in that window he turned pale to see the meeting between your wife and you, when, striking his forehead, he cried—'Good God, they are married!' Pray what was it to him that you or that any man had become the husband of Adèle? He was more on his guard afterwards, but I saw it still, and you never did. Do not pity me, I say; I have been wronged, but I have not been blind."

With a tormenting interest which he would not have acknowledged even to himself, Mr. Osborne heard her. He hated to think that Monsieur de Launay should have presumed to admire his wife so far as to be jealous of him, her husband, but he scorned to confess it. He smiled, and said, coolly—

"When a man marries a pretty woman, he must expect her to be admired. I do not quarrel with Monsieur de Launay for having admired Adèle. She is beautiful, and it would be strange if he had not seen it."

The eyes of Isabella sparkled with resentment, but the coldness of Mr. Osborne's manner always exercised a sort of control over her; and though his words now seemed to her no less than an insult and a taunt, the retort that rose to her lips died there unspoken, arrested by the calm severity of his dark eyes, and by the steadiness of his fixed look—a look that said plainly—"Think before you speak."

She did not answer, and he said no more. In a few minutes the door opened again, and Mrs. Osborne and Capitaine Joseph entered. Adèle appeared last. She came in leading Lilian by the hand. For once the youthful grace of her aspect gave her husband a sort of pain, for once he looked at her and beheld her beauty without pleasure. Could it be that Monsieur de Launay's admiration had gone so far as his jealous sister declared?

He bit his lip, and carelessly received Lilian's kiss. Adèle stood by his side; she looked at him wistfully, for she saw well enough that something ailed him; but this was no time and no place for questions. She told Lilian to let her papa alone, and gently took her away.

The dinner began; it was silent and formal. "What ails them all?" thought Adèle, looking round on the little circle. Isabella she did not venture to address; that young lady looked even more than usually gloomy; but she said to Mrs. Osborne, next whom she sat—

"Are you not well, Madame?"

"This stormy day has given me a headache," replied Mrs. Osborne.

Her tone was civil, but distant, as Mr. Osborne noticed and resented. He looked at her cold face, at Isabella's sullen countenance, and he angrily wondered when this unamiable family would leave him his home and peace. But as he, too, forgot to speak, the meal would have been entirely silent, if, towards its close, Capitaine Joseph had not fortunately begun a flirtation with Lilian, by which it was somewhat enlivened. Mrs. Osborne and her daughter remained portentously grave. Adèle smiled once or twice, but her husband saw the smile fade from her face as her look rested on the solemn countenances of her mother and sister-in-law. "It will not last long, it could not," he thought, as he rose from the table.

He gave a look at the sky, and at once Adèle guessed, with the quick intuition of affection, an intuition that springs from constant attention, that he was going out. She, too, rose, and went up to him.

"It is late to go out," she said wistfully.

"But not too late," he replied gently.

He saw his stepmother and his sister exchange a look significant though rapid; he kindly drew his young wife towards him, and looking down fondly in her upraised face, he silently vowed that their malice should be defeated yet. Mr. Osborne and Isabella were standing apart. Capitaine Joseph and Lilian were carrying on their flirtation, which degenerated into romping. Without saying that he was going out, Mr. Osborne left the room, and Adèle followed him silently. They now stood together on the door steps; her arm was passed within his, her head rested against him.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"To Nantua."

"What for?"

"On business."

She raised her languid head. She had felt sad the whole day; she felt sadder as it drew to a close. She looked at the sky; clouds, purple and vast, passed across it; the light of the setting sun down the mountains, on the lake, and across the path, looked lurid and fitful; the air was hot and oppressive. Her head sank back, and she sighed.

"Do not go," she said, "there will be a storm to-night. Stay for this once with me."

"There will be no storm, and I shall be home early," he replied with a smile.

"But why must you go?" she asked.

"Because I can have no peace and no rest unless I do go," he replied, with involuntary force.

She gave him a wondering look; he did not give her time to question.

"I shall be home early," he said again, and he was gone.

She stood looking at him until he vanished down the path; then she re-entered the house and apathetically returned to the dining-room. Mrs. Osborne and her daughter were conversing in whispers.

"It must be for that he is gone," said the mother.

"Of course it is," impatiently replied Isabella; "I care nought about it."

Here Mrs. Osborne, perceiving that Adèle stood looking and listening to their broken speech, pulled her daughter's skirt, a hint to be silent which Isabella indignantly received with a—

"I really do not care who hears me."

Adèle turned away and went and sat in one of the windows that overlooked the road. He was but just gone, and she was already longing for his return. She felt full of sorrow, she herself could not have said why, and tears, of which she was not conscious, slowly flowed down her cheek. A gentle cough roused her from her reverie. She looked up and perceived that she was alone in the darkening room with Capitaine Joseph. Mrs. Osborne, Isabella, and even Lilian were gone. He stood by her chair, looking down at her with evident emotion.

"Do not fret," he said, kindly, "it will be nothing, rely upon it."

"What will be nothing?" asked Adèle, with such evident wonder, that her brother-in-law saw that she knew nothing, and perceived he had committed a blunder.

"What you are fretting about, whatever that may be," he said, with an air of bonhommie that deceived Adèle.

"I am fretting about nothing," she said; "I feel sad, but I have no cause."

"The cause may come yet," thought Capitaine Joseph, rubbing his nose, but he only said, "Ah!" and spoke of Lilian.

"She is a charming little thing," he said; "but she pinched me—she actually did."

"And she is out in the garden now," cried Adèle, starting up as she heard Lilian's voice outside; "oh, the naughty child! she will take cold. If you do not help me to catch her, Capitaine Joseph, I shall never be able to get her in. She is so disobedient."

"I shall be pinched again," said Capitaine Joseph; "but I mind nothing in your service."

They went out together. Evening was falling on the old garden, and the dew already lay heavy on the grass-plot where Lilian sat playing. In her sweetest tones Adèle called in her little stepdaughter, but Lilian did not move.

"Your papa will be very angry," said Adèle gently.

"I don't care."

"And I shall not marry you," said Capitaine Joseph, solemnly.

"I would not have you," replied Lilian; "I do not like your ugly yellow moustache."

There is no denying that Capitaine Joseph was considerably piqued. His moustache was his weak point, his heel of Achilles; he had a vague feeling that it was not of the right colour, that it might have been of a more becoming hue. He had intended to use great diplomacy with Lilian, to lure her in with some stratagem worthy of the wise Ulysses himself, and without so much as stirring hand or foot, but on hearing her insolent speech his resolve vanished. He made a dart, in vain Lilian screamed, she was caught in a second, brought in to her mamma, and dropped without having so much as had the time to inflict one pinch on the valiant captain.

"There! what do you say to that?" he asked, triumphantly.

"There never was a better brother-in-law," replied Adèle, who liked him, perhaps, because he liked her.

Capitaine Joseph smiled and smoothed his injured moustache, and looked rather tenderly after Adèle, as she re-entered the house, holding by the hand her little stepdaughter, who, since her capture, had remained sulkily silent.

"It will go hard if I do not help that nice little thing to get out of that scrape," thought Capitaine Joseph, rubbing his chin. "The insolent little monkey is like her father;—yellow, indeed!" We need not say to whom the latter remark applied.

CHAPTER LII.

LOVE STORIES.

THE day had been warm; the evening was sultry and dark. Adèle sat alone in her room. Her window was open; it framed a starless sky, on which the black outline of hills was scarcely visible. Not a breath of air stirred the muslin curtains; no passing breeze flickered the steady flame of her little bronze lamp: an antique lamp it was, which had been found in Pompeii, and had lit in its day the anxious or idle vigil of some Greek or Roman beauty, and which now burned in an old French manor, and illumed the fair and blooming face of the daughter of those Frank barbarians who conquered both the Roman and the Gaul.

That lamp, one of Mr. Osborne's trophies from Italy, was

also one of his earliest gifts to his wife. Spite the dainty and elegant workmanship of the Cupid riding the dolphin, it gave but poor light, yet Adèle would allow no other to be lit in her room. Her husband laughed at her for a preference of which he did not seem to guess the cause. We need scarcely say, that he knew it well enough; we need not add that he liked it. He thought it childish, as it was, but are they the wisest things that please us best?

They had often sat together, with that ancient lamp lighting their two happy faces; but Adèle now sat alone, vainly and anxiously waiting for Mr. Osborne. It seemed to her impatience, as if he would never return.

"Oh! why does he not come back?" thought Adèle, repiningly. "Why does he not come! Has anything happened to him?" Dark and melancholy fancies haunted her—her heart sank within her bosom. She rose, she went to the window and looked out; she came back and sat down, and still she felt unable to rest. She thought she would go down to the garden; that the stillness of the night would calm her fevered blood. With a sort of haste she went down at once. Half-way on the staircase, she met Isabella going up to her bedroom with a light in her hand; it shone on her pale face; its rigidity struck Adèle. She could not help saying, as she paused before her sister-in-law:

"Are you unwell, Isabella? does anything ail you?"

A smile of scorn curled Isabella's pale lips.

"I am well," she said, "and nothing ails me."

She passed on, but not without having first measured Adèle, from head to foot, with a look of so much aversion, that it confounded Mr. Osborne's wife. Isabella did not heed this; she continued ascending the staircase; soon her door closed above. Adèle remained standing where Miss Osborne had left her, not so much offended as perplexed.

"What can have happened?" she thought again. She suddenly changed her resolve, and instead of going down to the garden, she opened the door of the drawing-room, by which she was standing, and where she had heard the voices of Capitaine Joseph and Mrs. Osborne, conversing.

Their discourse abruptly ceased on her entrance. She gave them a look of mingled pain and surprise, and she could not help saying, with marked emphasis:

"I am interrupting you."

"Oh! no," coldly replied Mrs. Osborne, "but it is so late. Good night." And with the remote look she had assumed since the afternoon, she left the room.

Adèle went to the central table, and stood by it for a while; then suddenly looking up at her brother-in-law, she said:

"Capitaine Joseph, what does all this mean—what has happened to-day?"

Capitaine Joseph stared amazed.

"Happened!" he echoed; "why, nothing has happened, surely."

She looked at him earnestly.

"I cannot say," she replied; "but I have always felt as if I had a friend in you; that is why I question you."

She spoke very simply, but that very simplicity only moved the more the soft heart of Capitaine Joseph. He knew, too, that she said the truth: he was her friend, and the only friend she had in his family. He had been defending and excusing her the whole evening to his mother and sister; but with little success: the jealous wrath of Isabella, the calm resentment of Mrs. Osborne, had repelled all his arguments: Adele had remained guilty, and had been condemned without appeal. "He will find her out yet," had been the vindictive prophecy of Isabella. Mrs. Osborne's quiet "time will show my stepson the truth," was more ladylike, but meant as much.

Capitaine Joseph's own private opinion of the matter was, that the letter was real, not forged, but that Monsieur de Launay would deny all knowledge of it, and that Mr. Osborne would wisely believe the denial. He was willing enough to serve Adèle, but to betray her husband's secrets to her would not have been to serve her. Accordingly, and with more amazement than before, he asked:

"Why, what should have happened?"

"Nothing, I dare say," she sighed; "but I feel as if some calamity hung over me to-night."

She sank down in the chair Mrs. Osborne had left vacant, and pressed her hand to her brow with an expression of trouble and pain unusual to her joyous and happy temper. Capitaine Joseph could not help dropping a hint.

"Well, well," he said, cheerfully, "calamity is not coming near you; but if it should come, if you should want a friend, you know you have one in Capitaine Joseph."

He spoke with some earnestness; to his surprise Adèle raised her head, and laughed joyously in his face.

"And my husband," she said, gaily, "where would he be? my best friend! My friend for life. Oh, no, Capitaine Joseph, I can have no friend in that sense, whilst he lives. If he should

die," she added, in a lower tone, "I shall need none, for I shall die too."

"Humph!" sceptically said Capitaine Joseph, not very well pleased at being so cavalierly put off. "Ladies are very sorry when their husbands die,—very sorry, but they do not always die themselves; the world would end if they did."

Adèle laughed, and did not justify herself, but she looked a little mischievously at Capitaine Joseph, as pretty women are apt to look at old bachelors—kindly, but gently mocking.

"She is a very pert little thing," thought Capitaine Joseph, decidedly piqued; but when he saw her so light, so gay, so trusting, when he remembered on what a chance the happiness of her whole life hung, pique yielded to sudden compassion. "Poor little thing!" he thought, "it might be better to warn her—but how?"

He suddenly raised his head, and drawing a deep sigh, he observed—

"I must bid you good night! I have a painful duty to perform to-night—an *auto-da-fé*."

Adèle opened her eyes.

"Yes," solemnly resumed Capitaine Joseph, "I repeat it, an *auto-da-fé*. Some ten years ago, a lovely woman wrote to me; I preserved her letters with tender respect; but this night they must be burned—her repose requires this painful sacrifice."

"Why so?" asked Adèle.

"She is married," said Capitaine Joseph, in a low tone; "I expect her husband shortly; there is nothing in those letters that can offend him, but they were written before marriage—never meant to meet his eye, and he is jealous as a tiger; the letters must be burned."

"But how does he know anything about them?" was the natural question.

"An enemy warned him that I had received and kept these letters."

"How did the enemy know it?"

"Hem! the enemy must have suspected it, for I was discreet as the grave."

Adèle did not look pleased.

"You have not been discreet," she said, positively, "or it would not have been known. You should have burned the letters when she married: she did not ask them back, because she trusted to your honour. You have not behaved well, Capitaine Joseph."

Capitaine Joseph felt and looked rather disconcerted; nevertheless he attempted justification.

"The truth is," he said, "that an enemy stole one of those letters from me, and sent it to the husband."

"But why did you keep them?" said Adèle, frowning.

"You forget," he replied, "that they were infinitely dear to me—that my only consolation was to read them and weep."

Adèle reddened, and interrupted him.

"What, take pleasure in reading the letters of a woman who was another man's wife? Ah, how wrong!"

She spoke with serious and solemn simplicity, and looked in his face with such modest reproof, that Capitaine Joseph wondered what foolish good nature had tempted him to bring all this upon himself, for there was something in the manner of Adèle that put him, *bon grè mal grè*, on the defensive.

"It was not pleasure I took in them," he said, "but pain. She was lost to me."

"It is no use speaking so, Capitaine Joseph; you know you were wrong, very wrong; and, indeed, you must have been negligent about those letters, or no one would have stolen one of them from you."

"The fact is," said Capitaine Joseph, thinking it better to drop invention, "that this was not a stolen but an intercepted letter, meant for me, indeed, but which I never received; but what am I saying?—it is one of my letters, yes, that is it, which she never received, you understand."

"Not quite well," said Adèle. "I thought it was her letter; you said so."

"I dare say I did. This whole affair drives me distracted. Imagine my feelings. I shall have to deny ever having written that letter. I shall have to give up her letters to the friend whom she will send for them—"

"I thought you were to burn them?" said Adèle, looking surprised.

"I should prefer it; but if she sends a dear and trusted friend to claim them in her name, I must give them up, must I not? Come, imagine the case to be yours. Which would you, if you were the lady, prefer?—to have the letters burned by your old lover, or given up—sealed of course—to a tender and delicate friend, who would place them, say in the drawer of your work-table, and never seem to know anything about them. You could have the pleasure of burning them yourself, leisurely, privately, comfortably, eh?"

Adèle gave him a look of quiet surprise; she thought his manner odd—his story confused and perplexed; but he had asked her advice, and she gave it.

"Burn the letters yourself, Capitaine Joseph; the friend might lose them."

"And fire tells no tales. True, I shall burn them at once!" he added, not sorry to leave the room. But Adèle detained him.

"You will not read them again, will you?" she said, persuasively, "it is not fair to that lady. Remember, that when she wrote them, she did not think she should marry her present husband. It is not fair to have kept them, and it would not be fair to read them."

Capitaine Joseph did not know what to think. Was Adèle a consummate actress, or did she feel so secure that she had not understood him? He looked at her; her look was as simple as her manner.

"On my word I shall not read them again," said Capitaine Joseph, laying his hand on his heart.

Adèle gave him an approving smile, and thus they parted. She remained alone in the drawing-room, and with solitude returned her troubled and anxious thoughts.

"Oh! I wish he would come," she exclaimed aloud, "I wish he would."

She went to one of the drawing-room windows, and raised the heavy crimson curtain. The night was dark, the road was silent, eleven struck in the church of Nantua. "Perhaps he will come through the garden," suddenly thought Adèle. At once she left the room, ran down the staircase and crossed the garden.

The air was oppressively warm. A sullen-looking moon had arisen; she shone beyond yellow clouds or sank in their misty depths, and allowed them to veil her sad aspect. "What ails you?" thought Adèle, looking up at her. "You, too, look troubled with some nameless sorrow; you, too, wander through the night like one seeking and never finding rest. Ah! if he came, all would be right. You might hide in your clouds or look from behind them—I should not care about you then."

She had reached the steps that led to the lake. The hour and the spot recalled that night of torment and happiness, when her husband had come to her there, and charmed away her doubts and her jealous sorrow. Happy remembrance. Brief pleasure! Soon returned the troubled mood.

"Perhaps he came back by the road, after all," she thought "perhaps he is wondering where I am."

Lightly she ran through the alleys, and reached the house breathless. At the door of the hall she met Jeanette.

"I was looking for Madame!" she said.

"Monsieur is come back?" cried Adèle, with sparkling eyes.

"No Madame, but he has sent word he will not come back to-night. The messenger is just gone."

The face of Adèle fell; but she soon rallied. She knew, at least, that nothing had happened to her husband. What more did she want? He had not been able to return. All was as it should be. Still she felt sad.

"It is no use staying up," she said, with a sigh; "yet I do not think I can sleep."

"Shall I try and send Madame to sleep with one of my old stories?" asked Jeannette, dubiously.

"Yes, do, and undress me to-night. I will not have Madame Leroy. Tell her so. She teases me.—You need not tell her that," she added, looking round with a smile.

"Oh! why did he not come back?" she thought, pausing on the staircase. "Why did he not come back?"

She slowly went up to her room. Jeannette found her sitting languidly in a chair, and had some trouble in persuading her young mistress to undress and go to bed. At length Adèle yielded, and in a few minutes her head lay on her pillow. Jeannette carefully put the light away, so that it might not offend her eyes, and sitting down at the foot of the bed, she asked gravely—

"What story shall I tell Madame?"

"Any story you like, Jeannette, but not a horrible one. Something like *Alcestris*, or your young master, but nothing about my lady Philippa or Louis the Wicked; but it may be as sad as you wish. I think I should like to cry."

A sigh half stifled the last words. Jeannette heard, but did not rightly understand.

"Mademoiselle—Madame, I mean—wonders that my old stories are sad; but happy things are forgotten and the sorrowful alone are remembered. I do know a story, not a very long one, which would be no story at all if it were not sad. It is not about *Alcestris*, nor about my young master, nor about great and wicked people, but about a poor peasant girl, who died before I was born."

"What was her name?"

"Her name was Catherine. I call her poor, because poor Catherine has remained a byword; but poor she was not born; her father was a farmer, and Catherine was his only child. I

have never seen her, of course, but I have so often heard her described, that I know her quite well. She was a handsome girl, with blue eyes and fair hair, and cheeks like the rose. She was tall, too, and the very turn of her neck would have made you know her anywhere. Well, Catherine was about twelve or so, when standing one evening at her father's door, she saw a poor beggar boy pass. He was thin and haggard, and sunburnt; he was lame, too, and could scarcely walk. 'Wait awhile, poor little fellow,' says Catherine; in she runs to the house and fetches him bread and cheese to eat, and milk to drink, and he ate and drank like one starving. Well, the father of Catherine comes up, and he talks to the lad, and, to make a long story short, he took Pierre, his name was Pierre, and he was a poor orphan, from Roches, I have been told; well, he took Pierre into the house and kept him till his foot was well, and then offered him work on his farm if he would stay. The boy was honest and not lazy: he remained. Well, Catherine grew up, and so did Pierre. She became a beauty, and he was still a poor, sheepish fellow, whom every one liked for his kind heart. Surely women are odd. Catherine might have had any one in her own rank, but no one save that Pierre would do for her. She so set her heart upon him, that her father let her have her way, and, as he was getting old, he made interest with the owner of his farm, and had it given to Pierre; and scarcely had the poor old man done that, when he died. Well it was for him. He had been dead some time, and they were to be married soon, when Pierre fell ill, and a sad complaint it was then and is still. He had the small-pox. Catherine was like mad; night and day she sat with him, till he was well again; Pierre was what he had ever been, neither uglier nor handsomer, but Catherine fell ill in her turn: true she did not die, but she lost all her beauty. Ah! she was sorely cut up, but Pierre comforted her. She was as handsome as ever in his eyes, he said, and, handsome or ugly, she was still his own Catherine."

"Why do you call that story sad, Jeannette?" said Adèle, smiling; "that is love, you know. If I were to lose all my beauty, do you think he would love me less? He would love me more, Jeannette. Oh, how hot this night is! I hope we shall have no storm to-morrow to prevent him from returning. Look out, Jeannette, and tell me if the stars are shining."

Jeannette rose and went to the window; she raised the curtain and looked.

"I see the light of the moon on the road," she said, "but I see not one star in the sky."

Adèle sighed.

"The moon may shine," she said, "but I do not like black nights without stars. Oh, Jeannette! he has spoiled me; would you believe it, I feel wretched because he did not come back this evening?"

She raised her hand to veil her eyes that overflowed with tears. Jeannette resumed her chair at the foot of the bed, and said, after a pause—

"Can Madame sleep now, or shall I go on with the story of Catherine?"

"Is it not finished?" asked Adèle, looking round; "why, what more is there to say? They married and were happy, like people in fairy tales."

Jeannette shook her head.

"Life is not like a fairy tale, Madame. Catherine was getting stronger, but she still kept her room, when one day—it was a warm day, too—she fell asleep. The voices of Pierre and Lise talking in the next room awoke her; Lise was a cousin of hers, the widow of a soldier, who had come to take care of Catherine. She was a handsome woman, too, but bold and forward. Well, she and Pierre were talking, and Pierre was saying 'I tell you, that though I would as soon see my funeral as my wedding-day, I shall marry Catherine when the time comes.' Lise cried sorely, and upbraided him with having deceived her, but Pierre did not give in. 'I like you best,' he said, 'but I shall marry her.' Catherine was not strong, but there are things that would rouse the dead from their graves. She got up out of her bed, dressed herself, and walked out of the house that hour. She went to an old aunt of hers that lived hard by, and stayed there. The beggar whom she had fed at her father's door remained master of her father's house; the man whom she had minded in his sickness married the handsome widow."

"Ah! he never liked her," cried Adèle, with passionate vehemence, "never—never."

"Yes, he did," said Jeannette; "but as men like women, and that is not as women like men,—oh, no, Madame. Well, the story is not ended yet; Catherine was poor now, and had to live by spinning; the whole day long she sat and spun at her aunt's door, and by that door Pierre had to pass every day. He never looked at her,—never once, but he saw her well enough. He was rich, he had a good farm, a handsome wife, and two fine boys; but he was not happy, for Catherine sat spinning at her door. She was there like a ghost, and he wore away to nothing, like a

haunted man. People said it was remorse and shame, but it was not, it was something else. He had been married five years, when he found out one day that Lise was not his wife, that her husband was living when he married her. How he discovered that I cannot say, but he knew it, and every one else along with him; but as the husband was really dead now, there was no one but thought he would marry Lise at once. Not he. He went to Catherine as she sat spinning at her door as usual; he spoke to her for the first time for five years, and it was to tell her that he loved her, that he could not live without her, and that he would and should marry her. Catherine did not answer, but she got up and went into the house and locked the door. For a whole month Perrie was like a madman about that house, but he never so much as got a sight of Catherine. At the end of the month he gave it up; he went and married Lise, who, though she was half mad with spite, was obliged to take him for her own sake; and the day after he married her, he went and threw himself into the lake. So you see, Madame, that he did love her, after all."

"Ah, do not call that love, Jeannette, and tell me no more such stories. Let lovers die, but let love live. I will not believe that when a woman's beauty goes, the man's affection goes with it. It would break my heart to think of such a thing. I hate that Pierre, who liked two women and was true to neither."

"He never liked but Catherine, Madame; his love cooled awhile when she lost her beauty, but he still loved her, and the chance of having her, and the misery of not getting her, were too much for him in the end. Well, there is little more to say. He had married Lise for the sake of his children, and his children never enjoyed their father's inheritance. They died young, and the sons of Lise by a third husband had the land and the farm. Catherine went on spinning for a few years, then died too. She never held up her head after Pierre was found in the lake. He was a suicide, and was buried by two cross roads; but she was a good christian, and she was laid in the churchyard with christian dead. All that happened before I was born; I remember Lise, a stout, red-faced old woman, with rings on all her fingers. I remember, too, the spot where Pierre was buried. I have been told that Catherine often went and sat by it moaning the year before she died; and the old people, when I was a child, used to shake their heads and say, that long after she was dead and buried, she might be seen sitting there on cold moonlight nights wringing her hands and weeping bitterly, and lamenting for his lost soul; but God alone knows if it was true."

"Oh, Jeannette, Jeannette, why did you tell me this story?" asked Adèle, with passionate repining. "I am young and handsome, and beloved—I will not hear such things. I, too, might have the small-pox and be disfigured, but he would only love me the better. Oh, Jeannette, you do not know—no one knows what he is to me—what I am to him."

"God forbid that anything in what I have said should ever apply to Madame," fervently said Jeannette. "God forbid!"

"Well, then, tell me some other story—I want to forget this one. Let it be a love story if you like, and a sad one; let the lovers be unhappy, let sorrow, sickness, calamity fall upon them—but let them be faithful and true, Jeannette."

She spoke with a smile, and leaned on her elbow, looking at the old woman. Jeannette turned up her eyes and searched in her thoughts; but vainly. She shook her head and rose.

"Some other evening I shall, I dare say, find such a story as Madame wishes for, but this evening I cannot. In all the stories that I remember, the lover is either faithless, or the mistress betrays him, or they forget one another."

Adèle sank back impatiently.

"How tiresome you are, Jeannette. What, not one story of two faithful lovers!"

"Not one," said Jeannette—"but what about it? I shall find one for some other evening."

"He will be here some other evening," said Adèle, petulantly, "and what shall I care about stories then? He tells me beautiful love stories, better than yours, Jeannette."

"Perhaps Monsieur invents them," stiffly said Jeannette; "mine are all true. Does Madame wish for anything?"

"Look out and tell me if the stars are shining."

Jeannette raised the curtain again, and looked out.

"The moon is set," she said; "the night is dark, and there is not one star in the sky."

"I do not care," said Adèle, turning her face to the wall, "he will come back to-morrow."

Jeannette looked at the flushed face of her little mistress, and sighed as she left the room.

"She is too fond of him," she thought. "It is well to love one's husband, but to be in that state because he is away one night, it is too much. And yet that was the very way the little Countess went on about my young master. Ah! what does Madame mean by saying the world is going away?" thought

Jeannette, pausing on the staircase. "It goes round and round, and is for ever the same again. The old remember, and the young love."

CHAPTER LIII.

CAPITAINE JOSEPH'S ERRAND.

THERE had been a storm in the night, and grey was the next morning. A cloudy sky, misty hills, and a wet road greeted the eyes of Adèle when she awoke and looked out. "He will come back all the same," she thought. The only question was, would he return early or late. It was scarcely day as yet, the house was still, no one was up; as usual, Adèle stole down to her husband's sitting-room, but scarcely had she crossed the threshold when a circumstance, which her eye at once detected as strange, struck her; the door that led to the rooms adjoining this one, and which a drapery habitually concealed, was wide open. Who had displaced the heavy tapestry hanging?—who had ordered the door of that unused chamber to be opened? Adèle crossed the room, she entered the neighbouring apartment. The windows were securely closed, but a wax light burning on a table scarcely dispelled the gloom of the place. Before her, high and spectral, rose the lofty couch which she had found in the lumber-room. The end of the heavy coverlet swept the floor, the pillows were tossed and tumbled; the bed had been slept in. "He is come back, and he slept here," thought Adèle. A slight noise behind made her turn round with a beating heart; but it was only Jeannette.

"Where is he?—where is your master?" eagerly asked Adèle.

"Monsieur is gone out again."

The face of Adèle fell.

"Gone out again!" she echoed; "but he left some message. What was it?"

Jeannette shook her head. Monsieur had left no message.

"Gone out again!" said Adèle, "at what o'clock did he come back last night?"

"I met Monsieur below, as I left Madame's room."

"And you did not come and tell me," indignantly cried Adèle.

"Monsieur positively forbade me to disturb Madame," replied Jeannette, "and he told me to prepare this room for him, and I did, of course—servants must obey."

Adèle clasped her hands, and slowly shook her head like one amazed.

"Something has happened," she thought; "something which he does not want me to know—How did he look?" she asked aloud.

"Monsieur is always pale," replied Jeannette; "but he put his hand to his forehead once or twice—perhaps his head ached."

In vain Adèle questioned her again and again—Jeannette knew no more.

"I dare say he will come back to breakfast," thought and said Adèle, endeavouring to persuade herself that nothing strange had occurred, that everything was as it should be.

But Mr. Osborne did not appear at breakfast, and Adèle took that meal with her mother and her sister-in-law. The two ladies were solemnly grave.

"Is not William well?" asked Mrs. Osborne, glancing at his vacant place.

"Mr. Osborne is out," replied Adèle.

"I thought he had done with business," said Isabella, with a sneer.

"Perhaps it is not on business he has gone out," said Adèle, trying to smile.

"There were the strangest noises in the house all night," observed Mrs. Osborne, after a pause, "exactly under my room—what can it have been?"

"Mr. Osborne did not like to disturb me, and slept in the room below yours," replied Adèle, quietly; "that was the noise you heard, I dare say. He came home very late."

"I really do not think he can have slept at all," continued Mrs. Osborne. "I think he must have been walking about all night."

"He was composing a love sonnet to Adèle," said Isabella, and she laughed.

"My dear!" gravely said her mother.

Adèle looked at them both, and laid down her cup. What did the emphatic, pointed speech of Mrs. Osborne—what did the undisguised insolence of Isabella, mean? She leaned her elbow upon the table, and glanced from the mother to the daughter, and from the daughter to the mother back again.

"You both have a meaning," she said; "pray what is it?"

They were mute. She resumed:

"I am sorry, for your sakes, it is not a meaning that can be avowed."

Isabella rose and confronted her.

"You may learn it yet," she said.

Mrs. Osborne, too, rose.

"It is not my habit," she observed, with dignified reserve, "to interfere between a husband and his wife, to betray the secrets of the one to the other."

Adèle did not change her attitude, but looked at them both, with a secure, imprudent smile.

"Why, who could interfere between him and me?" she asked.

"Isabella, my dear, we shall soon leave this house—had we not better leave the room?" asked Mrs. Osborne, turning to her daughter.

"You know I did not wish to enter it," replied Isabella, haughtily.

Mrs. Osborne took her daughter's arm, and they both sailed out.

"I defy you," thought Adèle, looking after them. "He is mine, I defy you; do your worst—as I know you will." But, like them, she rose and left the room, without caring to finish her breakfast.

"The ladies have been quarrelling," thought Capitaine Joseph, when he at length came down and saw the table vacant, and the three cups of coffee standing half full. "When people do not eat," added Capitaine Joseph, sitting down, "mischief is brewing." And, being most pacifically inclined, he made, though alone, a hearty breakfast.

"He will come back to dinner," thought Adèle the whole day; but dinner-time came, and Mr. Osborne did not return. She scarcely expected that Mrs. and Miss Osborne would appear at the dinner-table after the scene of the morning; but they did; Mrs. Osborne through policy, Isabella through pride, had thought it best not to forsake the battle-field. Besides, Mr. Osborne's prolonged absence was an omen and a sign fatal in their eyes to the power of the wife.

When and how the storm would break, they could not tell; but it was brooding; sooner or later it would burst over her devoted head.

"The situation is growing awkward," thought Capitaine Joseph, looking round, and he was wondering by what discourse he could best enliven the formality of the forthcoming meal, when the door opened and Jean appeared, not with the dinner, but with a

message; Mr. Osborne wished to speak to Capitaine Joseph, for a moment.

"By all means!" was the prompt reply.

"Ah! he is come back—thank God!" cried Adèle, unable in her joy to think of anything else.

Capitaine Joseph found Mr. Osborne in his sitting-room. He was struck with his pale and haggard aspect, but he kept his thoughts to himself. Without preface or apology, like one too much absorbed by one thought to heed anything else, Mr. Osborne entered at once on the matter that had made him summon his brother-in-law.

"I have a favour to ask of you," he said. "I have an appointment with Monsieur de Launay this evening, you must have the kindness to keep it for me. I am ill, and cannot go."

"Certainly," readily answered his half-brother; "you do not look well at all; besides, a third person is best in these matters."

Without heeding him, Mr. Osborne continued—

"To-morrow morning he leaves France for Belgium. You see how fatal delay might be."

"Rely upon me. I shall see him to-night—even though it should be in his bedroom."

"He will try to shun you as he has shunned me yesterday, this morning, and to-day; listen to no excuses."

Capitaine Joseph smoothed his moustache, and smiled.

"Consider the thing as done," he said.

"Eight is the hour," resumed Mr. Osborne; "be punctual to the minute, or he will avail himself of the remission to get out of this. I wrote to him, I sent in messages, and if I had not met him by chance I should not have wrung this appointment from him. He was riding with some ladies, and I could not insist on immediate explanation; but I compelled him to say that he could see me at eight, and were it not that I am physically unable to go," added Mr. Osborne, "at eight—he should see me." He pressed his hand to his forehead, and looked very ill indeed.

"At eight he shall see me," said Capitaine Joseph. "What am I to say?"

Mr. Osborne took the letter he had received the preceding day from his pocket, and placing it in his half-brother's hand, he said:

"You will ask him if he wrote this?"

Capitaine Joseph carefully put the letter away, and looked thoughtful.

"In everything, let us look at the end," he said; "Monsieur

de Launay will grant that he wrote the letter, deny that he wrote the letter, or decline answering the question you choose to put through me—what then ? ”

Mr. Osborne frowned, and looked impatient.

“ You misunderstand me completely,” he said ; “ I have no quarrel with Monsieur de Launay. That letter, if true, was written when my wife was nothing to me—when Monsieur de Launay and Mademoiselle de Courcelles barely knew of my existence ; her right to receive, his to write, I do not deny.”

“ Then why rake up this old matter ? ”

“ Why ! because she must and shall be justified—because the letter is a shameful forgery, the work of a hidden foe, which Monsieur de Launay shall help me to discover ; I tell you that he knows or suspects something of this, I saw it in his face ; if he is an accomplice—I hope, for his sake, that he is not—he shall rue it dearly. But, for the present, I have no quarrel with him. I simply wish to know if this letter is in his handwriting—about its contents I do not trouble him. I do not dream of questioning his right to write it, but I want to know if he wrote it. You understand ? ”

He laid his hand on Capitaine Joseph’s shoulder, and looked impressively in his face.

“ Yes, yes, I understand,” said Capitaine Joseph, and internally he added—

“ Wilful men will have their way ; it will not end well for poor little Adèle ; but wilful men will have their way.”

“ And what are you two doing in here ? ” exclaimed the petulant voice of Adèle, as, unable to control her impatience, she opened the door, and looked in.

Mr. Osborne turned round ; the light of the window fell on his face ; its deadly pallor, its haggard expression, made his wife utter an expression of alarm.

“ You are ill ! ” she cried, springing towards him.

“ I am not very well,” he answered, quietly ; “ it is nothing, do not mind it. I have delayed the dinner long enough ; shall we not go in ? ”

He turned to leave the room. She took his arm, and looked up in his face.

“ Why did you come back so late ? ” she asked, whilst Capitaine Joseph discreetly walked away.

“ I was delayed.”

“ Why did you sleep below in that cold room ? ”

“ I dreaded heat ; my head ached ; I thought the cool would do me good.”

"Where have you been all day?"

"At Nantua."

She had time to put no further questions; they had reached the door of the dining-room; he opened it wide; they entered together. Her arm still rested on his; Mrs. Osborne and her daughter exchanged a glance: the storm had not broken yet.

The meal began; colder and more formal it was than had been that of the preceding day. Mrs. Osborne and Isabella did not open their lips. Capitaine Joseph thought it more prudent to be silent. The looks of his mother and sister, of the latter especially, told him they were getting impatient for the catastrophe, and that two or three unadvised words might produce it. Adèle looked wistfully at her husband, who touched nothing; he spoke but once.

"How is Lillian?" he said, turning to her.

"Lillian is well," she replied, pushing her plate away.

His altered looks, his silence, his coldness, made her heart swell. She saw Isabella smile; she saw Mrs. Osborne look steadily at her stepson; she saw Capitaine Joseph give her a compassionate glance; and unable to control her emotion, she rose from the table.

"Are you well?" at once asked her husband.

"My head aches," she said.

She went and sat down on a remote couch. He, too, left the table, but he did not go near her; he took up a newspaper, and went to one of the windows, where he read for a while by the declining light.

"He looks dreadfully ill," murmured Mrs. Osborne.

"He believes it in his heart," said Isabella; "he may deny it—I tell you he believes it."

With resentful triumph she looked at her sister-in-law; the look fell harmless on Adèle; her hand shaded her eyes. "He believes it," continued Isabella, addressing her own thoughts, "he knows it." Her glance reverted to her brother's pale and haggard face. "He pitied me; I think I may pity him now." She watched him with moody attention. Suddenly Mr. Osborne looked up from his paper, and fastened on his wife a look so troubled and so strange that it was well Adèle did not see it; then he paced the Hall up and down, like one who strives against a feverish dream.

"I shall see what there is in that paper," thought Miss Osborne. She rose, and deliberately went and took it from the chair where Mr. Osborne had laid it. Eagerly did Isabella look

over the "Courrier de L'Ain." With impatient avidity she read it through from the title-page to the name of the printer. The dull leader about the electoral law, the trite news of the place, the insipid feuilleton, did not stop her. Yet she found nothing, not a word, not an allusion, that could apply to Adèle, to Monsieur de Launay, or to Mr. Osborne. "What can it have been?" she thought. She looked up abstractedly, gnawing her lip with secret disappointment.

Adèle had risen, and was then in the act of leaving the room. The door opened and closed upon her, and Mr. Osborne neither looked at his wife, nor showed any inclination to follow her out. He was talking apart with Capitaine Joseph; and Mrs. Osborne, sitting back in a deep chair, was watching the speakers—hear them she could not—with calm attention.

"Ah, bah!" said Capitaine Joseph aloud, as he turned away from Mr. Osborne, "you may say what you like, the law will never pass."

He went to the table, poured himself out a glass of wine, drank it slowly, took out a cigar, and nodding to Mrs. Osborne, who took no notice of the salutation, he walked out, humming an air.

Mr. Osborne remained a few minutes behind, then without looking at his mother or sister, he, too, left the room. At once, and with unusual rapidity of motion, Mrs. Osborne was by her daughter's side.

"Where is Joseph going?" she asked.

"Ay," replied Isabella, looking her mother in the face; "where is he going?"

They said no more. The front gate of the Manor had opened and closed again; a brisk foot had descended the flight of stone steps; the figure of Capitaine Joseph appeared on the solitary road. He gave a rapid look around, then walked on at quick rate. Isabella threw down the newspaper and sprang to the door of the Hall; her mother as rapidly followed, and the inner congratulations of Capitaine Joseph on the clever manner in which he had managed were not half over, when he was suddenly arrested: he looked round; his sister stood on his left, his mother on his right.

"Joseph, where are you going?" severely asked Mrs. Osborne.

"He is going to the Château de Launay, let him deny it if he can," said Isabella, with open wrath.

"I am going to purchase cigars at Nantua," placidly replied Capitaine Joseph; "I never had such cigars; and as I am going

away to-morrow morning—by-the-way, I hope you have not forgotten to prepare for our journey? What hour shall we leave at? Six too early? seven or eight ditto—nine, eleven—one more suitable, eh?"

"I shall not leave Courcelles to-morrow," said Mrs. Osborne.

"Nor I," immoveably said Isabella.

"Would I might echo 'nor I,'" sighed Capitaine Joseph, "but my leave is out, go I must. This is a lovely evening, and were you not both bareheaded, I should suggest a walk with me along the road."

"Where are you going?" imperiously said Isabella.

"To purchase cigars in Nantua," he phlegmatically replied.

His mother withdrew the hand she had laid on the shoulder of her elder son; coldly her cold blue eyes looked into his, and frigidly she said—

"Joseph, you are a fool—you should let this matter go on without you; you will get shy looks and secret hate for your pains."

"I protest I do not understand," began Capitaine Joseph, with a look of great innocence.

"What!" exclaimed Isabella, interrupting his protest, "what, shall so devoted a knight allow so good an opportunity of deceiving a husband's trust, of screening a wife's folly, to slip by? Impossible!"

"Is it possible," cried Capitaine Joseph, turning up his eyes, "that a man cannot go and purchase a dozen of cigars——"

"Cigars!" indignantly began Isabella.

Her mother checked her.

"Come in, Isabella," she said, gravely; "our place is not here. Joseph, I fear you are the foe, not the friend, of your family. You go to the strong side; you are worldly wise," added the unworldly lady; "you do well."

They gave him resentful looks and turned away. Unmoved by this parting taunt, Capitaine Joseph walked on. This little scene left him neither surprised nor discomposed. "Trust women for making a house hot if they can," was all he thought.

Capitaine Joseph went on with the complacency of one whom this task did not affect; Mr. Osborne remained behind with the tormenting irritation of one to whom its issue was vital.

"It is impossible!" he thought, as he sat alone in his study, "it is impossible; I cannot, I will not believe it."

He rose to walk about the room, but sudden giddiness com-

pelled him to resume his seat. He pressed his hand to his forehead, he tried to concentrate and master thought, but could not; he forbade a tormenting suspicion to come near him, and it returned, and with it images which he could neither fix nor control, which wandered like troubled spirits through his aching brain. He rose again, and again he sat down; the light of the lamp shone on his pale face; his fixed eyes gazed on the half gloom of the room. They saw a spectre hovering there—Doubt biding his hour. In vain, with all the might of his will, the husband of Adèle repelled that insidious foe; in vain he dared him to advance one step further, and defied him to prevail; the subtle enemy laughed at all his wrath, and, like a tempter, still haunted his vigil.

"Remember," he murmured in his ear, "she was very free with you; remember that. Yet you were a man, a young man and a stranger; remember."

"Innocence is fearless," he replied, "and she was innocent as Eve before the fall."

"Innocent! who is innocent? Of all the sons of Adam, one alone was found without sin, and He was a God. Of all the daughters of Eve, one alone was stainless, and she was His mother. Who can be called innocent? Not one on this wide earth—not one."

"But she was pure—pure as a child."

"She was a woman, not an angel. Call her child, if you like. She was a wilful, spoiled child, who derided the quiet reserve, who broke through the slight but wise barriers with which custom guards her sex. True, you were incapable of abusing the trust, but was another? you would never have led her into indiscretion, and from indiscretion into sin, but would you answer for the Baron de Launay?"

"He dare not, for his life he dare not."

"And who was there to terrify him, to guard her? He dare not? What will not man's cupidity, what will not man's passion, dare? He may have known that she was rich, he must have seen that she was beautiful. That he admired her as your wife, you know. You were too proud to be jealous, too secure; but did you like it? Remember the looks you have often seen; remember the jealous hate of Isabella—remember."

"Will that man never come?" thought Mr. Osborne, as nine struck; "would I had gone myself."

"She loves you now," still murmured the tempter; "but did she love you when she married you? She wished herself dead a

month after her wedding-day—have you forgotten it? Remember her long coldness—remember the misery written in her face—was it grief for her lost lover, was it remorse for having deceived you? Have no faith in her youth for the past. It is the young who fall most readily. Trust her not on account of her love for you in the present, that very love will urge her to deceive you. Do not take her word, do not believe her. She loves you very much, very much; she would forswear her soul rather than lose you.”

“I am getting delirious,” thought Mr. Osborne, as he felt his thoughts wandering more and more away from his control. He took up a book and looked at it steadily; but still that voice haunted him.

“Remember his guilty face this morning—remember his guilty look. And if he is guilty, can she be innocent?”

“Will that man never come?” again thought Mr. Osborne, throwing down his book. With more vehemence than lover ever longed for the presence of his mistress, he longed for the return of Capitaine Joseph. Nine had long struck, and now half-past nine, and ten followed it, and Mr. Osborne, unable to bear more, rose, left his room, and went to the Hall to wait there. Even before he reached the door, he heard voices within, and in one of them he at once recognized the tones of Capitaine Joseph. Mr. Osborne opened the door and stood for a moment on the threshold. Capitaine Joseph stood between his mother and his sister, defending himself as best as he might.

“You wrong me, Joseph,” feelingly said Mrs. Osborne, with her handkerchief to her eyes, “if you suppose that my motives for inquiring into this are any save the purest. But the peace, the honour of our family, are at stake.”

“But what have I to do with all this?” asked Capitaine Joseph, turning up his eyes. “I went to Nantua to buy——”

“He is mocking us,” interrupted the short, irritated voice of Isabella. “Does he think we are blind fools, like William? I tell you,”—she paused abruptly on seeing her brother, who came forward, pale and indignant. He looked bitterly at his mother and sister, but without addressing them, he turned to Capitaine Joseph.

“You have been long away,” he said; “and I, too, like the ladies, was getting impatient for your return.”

“William, you wrong me,” began Mrs. Osborne; “I only wished——”

“To know before I did what reply Capitaine Joseph brought

me—the wish was natural and praiseworthy; Isabella, too, shared in your anxiety. You are both too kind.”

“I wished to know the truth,” said Isabella, boldly; “the truth, and no made-up story.”

Mr. Osborne looked at Capitaine Joseph.

“You hear that,” he said; “your mother and your sister ask for the truth, and for no made-up story. Pray speak.”

Capitaine Joseph coughed, and looked on thorns.

“I protest,” he said; “I cannot imagine what all this is about. I went to Nantua to buy cigars.”

“You went to the Château De Launay,” said Isabella, “and you know what you went there for.”

“That girl is possessed,” thought Capitaine Joseph.

Mr. Osborne sank down in a chair and smiled.

“You hear that, Capitaine Joseph,” he said; “you went to the Château De Launay.”

“They are all possessed,” growled Capitaine Joseph, between his teeth, but he did not answer.

“Speak,” continued Mr. Osborne, “I wish for no secret—for no mystery.”

Capitaine Joseph did not reply.

“The accusation has been public and open,” calmly pursued Mr. Osborne, “and public and open shall be the defence. What did Monsieur De Launay say?”

“Wilful men will have their way,” grumbled Capitaine Joseph; but unable to make up his mind to give a straight answer, he said,—

“Say, why he said nothing—what was there to say on such a foolish matter?”

Mr. Osborne frowned and looked impatient.

“Capitaine Joseph,” he said, “I wish for no disguise—I wish for the truth, and nothing but the truth.”

He spoke with a firmness that mastered both illness and emotion. Mrs. Osborne looked earnestly at her eldest son, and Isabella waited for his reply with jealous watchfulness.

“Poor little Adèle,” thought Capitaine Joseph, “her best friend is her worst enemy.”

“Ah, bah!” he lightly said, speaking aloud, “how much you all make of a little girl’s flirtation! I saw De Launay, spoke to him, and found him a little tender on the subject, like all jilted lovers. The liking, it seems, was all on his side—which is not difficult to believe—he asked, indeed, for meetings, but never got them, and was ultimately thrown by like an old bouquet. Alto-

gether," added Capitaine Joseph, stroking his chin, "I pity that poor De Launay, he really was not well used."

"But he wrote the letter?" said Isabella, looking steadily in her brother's face.

"Oh, yes, of course," carelessly replied Capitaine Joseph.

"You have not told all," she pursued, frowning; "there is more, Joseph."

"Ah, bah!" he said, ironically, and putting his hands behind his back, he walked away to the other end of the room, whistling a march.

Mrs. Osborne looked at her stepson. He sat pale as death, with thick drops of sweat on his brow; his trembling hand wiped them away, but they returned, gathering fast. Yet his eye was firm, and with the calmness of unconquered will he looked around him and spoke slowly and deliberately.

"I do not believe it," he said; "it is a lie from beginning to end. He may have dared anything in thought or in act, she never so much as knew it—she never so much as cast one look upon him. It is a lie, I say, a lie for which Monsieur de Launay shall be accountable to me yet. It is a lie, and I shall prove it."

His burning look, his pale face, his trembling lip, dared denial. Even Isabella did not venture to utter a word. Once more he looked around him.

"I again desire that my wife may know nothing of this," he said. He rose and left the room. Mrs. Osborne looked at Isabella and smiled. Doubt had entered his heart, and they saw it.

Mr. Osborne went on to his sitting-room. His head swam, his pulse beat with the rapidity of fever. He entered his study, he went to his chair, and sank down in it; he pressed his hand to his head, it felt like a dull, inert mass. "My mind is leaving me," he thought; "I have delayed too long."

"What ails you to-day?" asked a low fond voice by his side.

He looked up amazed, and the arms of his wife were thrown around him, and her cheek was laid to his. Unable to bear so long and unusual a separation from him, she had conquered her pride and come unasked to his room during his absence.

For a while Mr. Osborne remained mute in her embrace; then trembling with passionate emotion, he rose; he averted his face from hers, he untwined her arms from around him.

"Do not," he said, "do not."

Adèle, too, shook from head to foot.

"Would you prefer being alone?" she asked.

"Yes," he replied, still without looking at her or turning round, "I should."

She left the room without another word.

Mr. Osborne went to the door, which his wife had left ajar, to close it and draw the bolt; but a fair hand that interposed itself fearlessly between door and panneling, thwarted his intention.

"Who is there?" he sharply asked.

"It is I, William," replied his stepmother's voice; "may I not speak to you?"

Mr. Osborne withdrew from the door and allowed her to enter. She came in softly.

"May I speak to you?" she said again, and without waiting for his reply, she continued: "William, I fear you have misunderstood me and my intentions. If I wished to learn from Joseph——"

"We will not speak of that," he interrupted; "you were not more willing to learn than I was that you should know. More you shall learn yet—it is not over; the slanderer shall die, and the slanderers—but we will not speak of that. I have a favour to ask of you."

Mrs. Osborne bowed her head, and implied that he had only to speak; he fixed his eyes upon her, and resumed:

"You told me yesterday to command you. I am going to put you to the proof now. I feel ill—very ill. I have sent for Docteur Guillaume; he will tell me whether, as I fear, my disease is contagious. Until he comes, Adèle must not approach me. If I lock the door on myself I may alarm her unnecessarily. Will you remain here for an hour, and prevent her from entering should she come again, for she may not? You can say, which is true enough, that my head aches."

He spoke slowly and with evident effort.

"You look very ill indeed, William," said his stepmother, approaching him.

"Do not come too near me," he observed, "there may be danger for you too."

"I fear no contagious disease," she replied, smiling; "and none, if I may judge from past experience, has power over me."

"So I have heard you say, or I should not have requested this favour from you. Nevertheless, be careful. This may be nothing, it may also be dangerous; there are several epidemics abroad, as I read in the newspaper to-day."

"Do not talk so much," she interrupted, "you are growing very pale."

Illness was, indeed, written in his whole aspect. He went to the door of his room and opened it; on the threshold he paused and looked back, and said impressively—

"You will not forget that Adèle is not to come in."

"She shall not," resolutely replied Mrs. Osborne.

"And you will not forget," he continued, "that she is to know nothing of Monsieur de Launay's letter. In due time I shall tell her all, but not now."

Mrs. Osborne laid her hand on her heart.

"William," she said, "you have often wronged me. You must learn to do me justice now; from me your wife shall know nothing."

"I rely on your word," he said, emphatically.

He entered his room; the door closed upon him. Steadily Mrs. Osborne looked at that closed door.

"I did not ask for his trust," she thought; "what has tempted him to repose trust in me? Were we not antagonists from the day when the boy first saw his father's wife and looked her in the face with secret defiance, from that day until this? Has he not despoiled me and my children? Has he not thwarted and opposed me, and does he think that now, when he voluntarily places himself in my hands, sick and defenceless, does he think that the net he has entered shall not close upon him? You trust me, William, because you cannot help it; anything to spare the loved one, the wife whom you love and hate, deny it though you will. Anything to save from unsightly scars the girlish face that has charmed you so well. You trust me, not because you rely on my honour, but because you defy my power in your heart." She leaned her cheek upon her hand; she paced the room up and down; she seemed, and she was, absorbed in thought.

Ungratified ambition had secretly consumed the heart and the life of this calm, fair woman. There is a crisis in every human existence, and to Mrs. Osborne, who had dreamed of power her whole life long, who had schemed and striven for empire, and never been but the conquered subject of an inexorable husband, the toy and tool of unruly children, it now seemed again that her hour was come, an hour all the sweeter for having been so long delayed. The fortunes of Robert were low, Anna was nothing; the beauty of Isabella had tried to conquer, and had failed miserably; the Osbornes were a decaying family, William alone had survived the storm, and his daughter it could not reach; but what availed

it to the younger Osbornes that this elder branch should still be vigorous and flourishing? a strange woman, a girlish wife, had both the master of Courcelles and his child.

"He is ill, and very ill," thought Mrs. Osborne, "and every illness may end with death. If he lives I will have him, if he dies I will have Lilian." The door opening without previous knock or admonition, roused the lady from her reflections. At once she stood by it, and with extended arm she barred the entrance of Adèle.

Full of grief and resentment at his unkindness, the wife of Mr. Osborne had left his presence, but resentment soon cooled, and grief became remorse. "Ah, how passionate and hasty I am!" she thought in the garden, whither she had fled; "how well he may call and treat me like a spoiled child! Could I not see that some great trouble is on him, that some calamity has befallen him, or he would not be strange? Oh, I must go back, not to tease him with unseasonable fondness, but to learn all that grieves him, to share his grief, whatever it may be, and help him to bear it. Let him be sharp or short with me, I do not care. I am his wife, and I must take him in his wayward moods as well as in the fond and sweet."

At once she left the garden, she went to her husband's study, she entered it without knocking, and she found her mother-in-law forbidding, with a gracious smile, her further entrance.

"Hush!" she said, lightly laying her finger on her lips; "he is asleep."

"Where?" asked Adèle, looking round.

"In the next room, of course. He prefers it—the air is cool and his headache is worse. No—no, you really must not enter," she added, stepping before Adèle, who had attempted to pass on.

"Why so?" asked her daughter-in-law.

"Because he is asleep, my dear."

"I shall make no noise."

And again she attempted to pass.

Mrs. Osborne quietly locked her stepson's room door, and put the key in her pocket. Adèle looked at her in mute amazement. The lady smiled.

"My dear child," she said, "is it possible you do not understand that William wishes to be alone, and has constituted me door-keeper? Come, do not look so surprised, there is nothing in it."

Adèle clasped her hands with some force; fixedly and moodily she looked up in her mother-in-law's face.

"What is it?" she asked; "what does it mean?"

"I fear I have accepted an ungracious office," said Mrs. Osborne, shunning her glance; "but ask to know nothing from me—I have passed my word that I would not speak, that you should not enter."

The blood rushed up to the brow of Adèle; her look lit, her voice, though low, trembled as she replied:

"You want to alarm me—I tell you it is useless; and but that I do not wish to waken him, I would show you how vain and how fruitless is the attempt. I have been forbearing, too forbearing by far, with your children and you; but I am weary of being insulted in my husband's name, in my husband's house. Let him sleep in peace to-night; he shall waken to-morrow, and I warn you that this unprovoked insult shall be the last you will ever offer me."

"I have accepted an ungracious office," sedately said Mrs. Osborne; "but I shall do my duty. I obey William's orders: I am perfectly willing to abide by his decision."

Tears rushed to the eyes of Adèle; her heart swelled, but pride would not let her insist or prolong the contest. She yielded, and left the room.

CHAPTER LIV.

A MESSAGE.

ADELE went up to her room. Jeannette was there, preparing everything for the night. She turned round on hearing her mistress enter. The old servant paused in the act of pouring some water into a crystal decanter, and said, earnestly:

"Madame is very pale; is she not well?"

"My head aches," replied Adèle, sitting down. "Is that the book I was reading to-day? Yes—give it to me, Jeannette—thank you."

She opened the book; her eyes were fastened on the page, but her hand did not turn it.

"This lamp will not burn to-night," said Jeannette; "shall I light the other one, Madame?"

Adèle looked up; the flame of her little antique lamp was flickering feebly, and seemed ready to expire.

"Why should it not burn to-night?" she asked, moodily; "do you want to make an omen of it? to make me superstitious? Let it burn or not, what matter?"

"Then I shall light the other one," said Jeannette.

"I tell you it will burn well enough, if you give it oil and wick."

"It has both, and it is going out."

The flame was dying away; Adèle watched it until it vanished, then she rose, went to the lamp, and showing Jeannette a grain of sand that stopped the narrow opening through which the wick passed, she said calmly:

"You see what it was: a grain of sand! and you would have had me believe that it was something."

She went back to her book; Jeannette looked at her with surprise.

"What ails her?" she thought; "what is going on in this house this whole day, that they all have such strange faces?"

"You need not do that, Jeannette," said Adèle, perceiving that Jeannette was drawing the window curtains close.

"Monsieur dislikes the light."

"You need not, I say; Monsieur Osborne is unwell, and sleeps below."

"And Madame stays with him."

"I stay here. He prefers being alone."

She had resumed her seat and taken her book; she pushed it away as she spoke, and leaned her forehead on her hand. Jeannette was mute with surprise, but she recovered so far as to say:

"I fear Madame's headache is very bad."

"Yes, very bad, indeed; open the window."

Jeannette obeyed.

"The stars are shining to-night," she said; "it is a beautiful night, mild and quiet."

Adèle rose and went, and looked out at the sky; it glittered with stars.

"Let them shine," she said; "they shone last night too, though we could not see them. You remember how troubled I was about it. Was it not foolish? For what hid them?—a cloud that melted away with the morning—no more. Shut the window, Jeannette, it is cold, quite cold."

She went back shivering to her place by the table.

"I am sure that book makes Madame's head ache worse," said Jeannette, "and as Madame does not seem to be sleepy, shall I tell her one of my old stories? I remember one, just such a one

as Madame likes, about two faithful lovers, a husband and his wife, a story without betrayal or infidelity."

Adèle bit her lips and looked provoked.

"Jeannette, what ails you?" she asked; "why on earth do you talk so to me this evening? What is there so surprising in Monsieur Osborne's having a headache, or choosing a cooler room than this? I tell you I think nothing of it—nothing."

"And why should I think anything of it, Madame?" asked Jeannette, earnestly.

"Then say or hint nothing about it!" rejoined her mistress, sharply.

"Ah, there is surely something amiss," inwardly groaned Jeannette; "all is not right—I never will believe it."

She could not make up her mind to leave the room. She settled one thing, then another, until nothing was left for her to do; she then turned round, and reluctantly supposed Madame did not want her any longer.

Adèle did not answer; she sat rigid as stone, pale as ashes, looking at a piece of paper which she had found in the book before her, and where, indeed, her own hand had unconsciously placed it the preceding day. It was the envelope of the anonymous letter, and within it were written in pencil, in a feigned hand, the following words, which no one save Adèle had read:—

"A friend of Monsieur Osborne's honour thinks it but right to forward to him the following letter, addressed by Monsieur de Launay to Monsieur Osborne's wife. Comments are superfluous."

"I am undone," said Adèle, with a groan, "I am undone!"

"Madame, Madame, what has happened?" cried Jeannette, running up to her.

Adèle gave her a dreary look.

"I am undone," she said again; "that was why he seemed so strange; that was why they all taunted and insulted me; that is why he would not kiss me.—I am undone." She laid her head on the table, and moaned.

Jeannette was at her wit's end.

"But, Madame, what can have happened?" she exclaimed, distractedly; "what can there be in that bit of paper?"

Adèle raised her head, and threw her arms around the neck of Jeannette.

"Jeannette," she said, "you will outlive your little mistress. I must die, my heart must break—I tell you it must. I shall leave you another sad story to tell, Jeannette, the saddest you ever told. Oh, I did not think he ever could forsake me."

She broke into tearless sobs.

"Madame," cried Jeannette, almost angrily, "this is folly; you are dreaming. Monsieur is passionately fond of you; you are above all else."

Adèle looked up gloomily.

"He would not see me—he would not kiss me—my deadly foe guards his door. I am undone—I am undone! I could have forgiven him again and again had he been ever so guilty."

"But, Madame," urged Jeannette, "this is some mistake, some dreadful misunderstanding. When you see Monsieur, all will be made clear."

"All is over!" said Adèle, drearily; "his faith in me, my trust in him, are broken—all is over. He has not accused me, he has condemned me unheard. He has not asked me for explanation or justification, he has listened to my enemies, and passed sentence upon me. And he told me once that the whole world could not prevail against me. If an angel had said to me—'He will forsake you,' I would have scorned the heavenly warning."

"All is not over yet," cried Jeannette, "God is just; all is not over yet."

Adèle did not heed her.

"I am cold," she said, shivering; "help me to lie down."

Jeannette obeyed; she raised her mistress in her arms, and softly placed her on the bed. Adèle turned her face to the wall, and closed her eyes.

"How does Madame feel?" asked Jeannette.

Adèle opened her eyes.

"I feel nothing," she apathetically replied, "nothing; the enemy has prevailed against me, and I am a vanquished woman. Do not think," she added, after a pause, "do not think that I accuse him. No, Jeannette, I dare say he could not help it, and be sure that he suffers more than I do. I have a consolation, moreover, denied to him; his image is stainless in my mind. And I—God help me!—and I—" she groaned, and covering her face with her hands, she said no more.

"Holy Virgin!" angrily cried Jeannette, "that any one should dare and think ill of you! Why, I would put my hand in the fire that you are as innocent as a baby!"

Adèle removed her hands from her face, and smiled sadly.

"Ah, but you are not my husband," she said; "you are not fond of me, exasperated at the mere idea that a man should dare to write love-letters to your wife. But I said I would not accuse him, and I never will. I once called him my king, and I will be a loyal subject to the last."

Jeannette wrung her hands.

"If Monsieur could think ill of you," she passionately began; but Adèle raised her hand, and said—

"Jeannette, you have often called me a Republican; but there is one of your old stories which I ever loved dearly. When Jean de Courcelles was beheaded for high treason, by sentence of the Parliament of Dijon, he turned to the people as he reached the scaffold, and before he laid his head on the block, he cried out—'*Vive le Roi!*' And you know, Jeannette, that his innocence was proved—that the same Parliament of Dijon that had condemned him, rehabilitated his memory, and restored his confiscated lands, and amongst them this very Manor of Courcelles, to his descendants. As he did, the last of those descendants will do. She, too, has her king, and she, too, is falsely condemned as traitor. But, Jeannette, he is none the less her king and her sovereign. She cannot prove her innocence, and she will not weary him with vain protestations or mean entreaties. She knows the time will come for her, as it came for Jean de Courcelles, when her sovereign will repent; when, though dead and gone perhaps, she will make him feel within his very heart that his little wife was true. And though that time should never come, even with her last breath, even with her head on the block, she will cry—'*Vive le Roi!*'"

Her voice died in passionate sobs and tears, with which those of Jeannette mingled. She seized the hand of her young mistress, and raising it to her lips, she cried, with indignant grief,—

"Madame, Madame, all is not over yet."

"No, all is not over yet," echoed Adèle; "he has given himself up to the enemy; his grief, his anguish, are but just begun."

"May I come in?" asked the soft voice of Mrs. Osborne at the door.

She entered, and with her Docteur Guillaume.

Mr. Osborne had slept a short, troubled sleep; he had wakened in a burning fever, haunted by one tormenting thought; "It is not true!" he ever repeated to himself, "it is not true!"

The door of his room suddenly, though noiselessly, opened, his stepmother appeared on the threshold, smelling a vinaigrette; without advancing, she said,—

"Adèle has been here. I told her your head ached, and that you were sleeping. Have I done well?"

"You have, thank you."

"Here is Docteur Guillaume," she added, drawing back, and allowing Docteur Guillaume to enter alone.

"Well, and what is the matter now?" asked Docteur Guillaume, a little impatiently.

Mrs. Osborne had left the door ajar; she did not hear her stepson's reply, but she heard Docteur Guillaume's rejoinder:—

"I should not wonder if you were going to have the small-pox."

Mr. Osborne moaned.

Docteur Guillaume hated milksops, at least so he said.

"Ah, bah!" he drily observed, sitting down, "it will be nothing. I have seven cases in Nantua, all thriving."

"Nothing! and Adèle, my wife! What will it be to her, poor child?"

Docteur Guillaume was an old bachelor. He had no sympathy with conjugal fondness.

"Ah, bah!" he said, ironically, "the most devoted of wives must bear with a husband's sickness; Madame Osborne is too reasonable not to bear with yours."

"You do not understand me," impatiently said Mr. Osborne; "she has never been vaccinated."

"True; I remember that her godmother considers vaccination a proof that the world is going away: she thinks, too, that it has injured the standard of the human race by sparing the puny and the weak. Mademoiselle de Janson should have been a Spartan under Lyncurgus."

"Good God! it may be her death," groaned Mr. Osborne.

"She must leave the house," said Docteur Guillaume.

"Leave the house, whilst I am sick in it—she never will. God help me! Why did not I stay in Nantua?"

"We can use art," said Docteur Guillaume, smiling.

"Do not, you would but alarm her more—you could not deceive her."

"Very well," replied Docteur Guillaume, who never lost time in useless argument. He took a pen, wrote down a prescription, and with the intimation, "it will be nothing—I shall call to-morrow," he was going to leave the room, when Mr. Osborne detained him.

"Do me the favour of seeing her this evening," he said; "tell her as gently as you can what ails me; entreat her not to come near me, and, if you can, indeed, persuade her to leave the house," he added, sighing; "do so."

"I shall do my best," replied Docteur Guillaume, with his hand on the door; "in a week you will be up and well."

Mrs. Osborne sat waiting in the next room; Docteur Guillaume crossed it, with a bow, but she detained him, and said, anxiously,—

“ Well ? ”

Docteur Guillaume knew little or nothing of Mrs. Osborne, but he disliked her, without caring to know why. Her calm speech, her still blue eyes, her unchanging smile, annoyed and irritated him. With more brevity than politeness, he echoed,—

“ Well, what about it. Keep him quiet.”

“ But what ails him, Docteur Guillaume ? ”

“ He is a little feverish—no noise, no agitation.”

“ True; but what is it ? ”

“ What is it ! why it is, or it will be, the small-pox, of course.”

Mrs. Osborne gave a start.

“ Ah, bah ! it will be nothing,” said Docteur Guillaume.

“ That dreadful disease ! ” she murmured.

“ Pooh ! pooh ! ”

“ Anna is fortunately out of the house, and Isabella has had it twice, but the child—but his wife—they must not go near him.”

“ Go near him ! They must leave the house.”

Mrs. Osborne shook her head.

“ Adèle never will,” she said ; “ besides, it might seem unkind; her husband might think——”

“ He wishes her to leave.”

“ I do not know how to keep her out of his room,” pursued Mrs. Osborne.

“ Lock the door.”

“ Ah, Docteur Guillaume, if you knew her devoted——”

“ Where is that obstinate little lady ? ” he interrupted, “ I must speak to her.”

“ She is in her room,” replied Mrs. Osborne ; “ I shall go with you. But pray tell her as guardedly——”

“ Of course,” he again interrupted, with the impatience of a man who had no time to lose.

Mrs. Osborne delayed him no longer, and first taking the wise precaution of locking the door of Mr. Osborne’s room, she accompanied Docteur Guillaume upstairs. She paused once on the staircase to observe,—

“ Did my son ask for a nurse ? ”

“ No, but I shall send one, of course.”

“ Do not ; let no mercenary hand——”

“ Is not this the door of Madame Osborne’s room ? ” interrupted Docteur Guillaume, who hated sentiment of any sort.

Mrs. Osborne assented, opened the door, and gently saying,—

“ May I come in ? ” entered as she said it.

“ Do not alarm yourself,” she began ; “ leave the room, Jeannette ;—do not, I say, alarm yourself.” She paused and looked at Jeannette, who had not stirred.

“ Leave the room, Jeannette,” said Adèle, sitting up in her bed.

Reluctantly Jeannette obeyed.

“ We are come, Docteur Guillaume and I, to bring you news of William’s headache,” pursued Mrs. Osborne.

Adèle, who now saw Docteur Guillaume for the first time, turned ashy pale, and fixed on him a terrified look.

“ What ails him ? ” she asked, scarcely able to speak.

“ Nothing—nothing—” shortly replied Docteur Guillaume. “ He sent for me at this hour, to prescribe for a headache. Absurd, eh ? ”

“ There is no fear of brain fever ? ” suggested Mrs. Osborne.

Docteur Guillaume gave her a wrathful look.

“ Brain fever—nothing like it.”

“ Or typhus ? ” she continued.

“ Typhus ! ” indignantly echoed Docteur Guillaume ; “ there is not one case of typhus in the whole department. He has nothing,” he pursued ; “ but he fancies he is going to have the small-pox.” Adèle started. “ I should not have disturbed you at this hour,” phlegmatically continued Docteur Guillaume, “ had he not requested me to do so.”

“ He asked you to come ? ” she said.

“ Yes, he wished you to know why you could not see him for a few days.”

“ I am not to see him ? ”

“ By no means : I forbid it, and Mr. Osborne begs you will not think of it.”

“ Docteur Guillaume, can you give me your word that he is not seriously ill ? ” asked Adèle, very earnestly.

“ By all means. I repeat it—nothing, or almost nothing, ails him.”

“ And I am not to see him ? ” she said, smiling strangely.

“ Might not Adèle see him at the door of his room ? ” suggested Mrs. Osborne.

“ Certainly not. Her husband would be much displeased, and very justly.”

Adèle smiled again.

"He does not wish to see me," she said.

"By no means; and if you will have the good sense to leave the house at once, and not return—"

"Excuse me," gravely interrupted Mrs. Osborne, "William cannot expect his wife to leave the house at such a moment."

"Ah! bah!" replied the Doctor, irritated at being so strangely opposed, "he will be delighted."

"Delighted, Docteur Guillaume—you mistake."

"Pray, Madame, were you present? I say, and I repeat, that Madame Osborne cannot gratify her husband more than by leaving the house."

The lip of Adèle quivered slightly, but she replied calmly—

"I shall give him that gratification, Docteur Guillaume, but not to-night."

"To-morrow morning, then?"

"Not to-night," said Adèle again.

"True, it is late," replied Docteur Guillaume; and seeing her so calm, almost cold, he wondered under what illusions concerning his wife's passionate fondness Mr. Osborne laboured; but it was no business of his. He rose, congratulated her with a touch of irony on her good sense, and bidding her good night, he left the room.

"Good-night," apathetically replied Adèle.

Scarcely had the door closed upon them, when it opened again, and Mrs. Osborne appeared, mild and dignified, on the threshold.

"Adèle," she said, "do me the justice to believe that with this I had nothing to do."

Adèle did not look at her. She shook her head, like one whom speech wearied, and let it sink back languidly on her pillow.

CHAPTER LV.

A DANGEROUS FRIEND.

On their way down, Mrs. Osborne and Docteur Guillaume were stopped by Marie, Lilian's bonne.

Mademoiselle Lilian had a headache, and felt sick, she said.

Mrs. Osborne gave Docteur Guillaume a significant glance; without a word, they went at once to the child's room. Lilian

lay moaning in her little white bed. Docteur Guillaume gave her a brief look, and said emphatically—

“The small-pox.”

Mrs. Osborne moaned.

“What about it?” sharply asked Docteur Guillaume; “you have had the small-pox, have you not?”

“I believe I have.”

“And you are alive and well. I say it will be nothing.”

Docteur Guillaume was in his most abrupt mood, and again repeating that Mr. Osborne and his daughter would do well enough if they were kept quiet, he left.

Mrs. Osborne had parted from him. She had re-entered her stepson's study; she had resumed her place in his chair. She was leaning back—her chin in her hand,—her whole aspect bespeaking thought, earnest and absorbing, when she suddenly beheld Isabella standing before her, with pale, angry mien.

“What brought you here?” coldly asked Mrs. Osborne, rising.

“I want William.”

“He is asleep, and ill. You cannot see him. What do you want with him?”

“I want to tell him that Joseph is a traitor, who has deceived him to screen his wife. I want to tell him that his wife is a vile deceiver, and Monsieur de Launay a dishonourable liar. I want to see him, because I have been wronged, and that I will be revenged.”

She spoke in a low, slow, deliberate voice, but pregnant with passion and resentment. Mrs. Osborne looked at her daughter; she saw well enough that Isabella was in one of those moods when she was not subject to her own control—when urged beyond her limited powers of self-restraint, she broke through every barrier.

“My dear girl,” she said, “you grieve me; you are not reasonable. Monsieur de Launay was free to write to Mademoiselle de Courcelles. Mademoiselle de Courcelles was free to write to him. They were even free to love. He was not bound to you; she was not bound to William. In short, this is a matter to be regretted. It is not a crime which either you or William can resent.”

She spoke in her smoothest tones.

Isabella laughed with bitter scorn.

“What!” she cried, “he was free to write to her whilst he was writing to me? What! she was free to have written to one man, had assignations with him, and two months later to become

the wife of another man, and never tell him?—such and such has been the case—have me after that if you like.”

“My dear, you exaggerate—I dare say you are mistaken—that Monsieur de Launay never could act so cruelly to you—that she could never be so shameless.”

“You will make me mad!” cried Isabella, clasping her hands with strange passion; “did I not tell you that Joseph was a traitor? Did I not tell him so to his face this evening?”

“Isabella,” said Mrs. Osborne, coldly, “your feelings carry you beyond justice. You make yourself the accuser of your family. I cannot allow my son Joseph to be thus unjustly condemned.”

Isabella gave her mother a strange look, but did not answer.

“Capitaine Joseph,” resumed Mrs. Osborne, “is incapable of treason under any shape; he would no more deceive William to favour William’s wife, than he would desert his flag in the hour of peril.”

Isabella folded her arms, and laughed.

“Go to his room,” she said, “go to his room, and look in the uppermost drawer of his table; look in the corner, and see what letters you will find there.”

“It is not my habit to pry into the secrets of my children,” said Mrs. Osborne, in a low, dignified tone. “Joseph is a man, long beyond my control; he may write and receive such letters as he pleases.”

“He write and receive letters!” impatiently exclaimed Isabella; “and do you suppose I would have troubled myself about his letters? They are *her* letters, I tell you—the love-letters of Adèle to Monsieur de Launay, and fond letters they are, letters which Monsieur de Launay, I have no doubt, has preserved with tender care, until Capitaine Joseph, like a kind brother-in-law, got them back for her. Well, well! it is not over yet; they thought to dupe me, but it is not over yet.”

Mrs. Osborne sat down—she had been standing the whole time—and raised her handkerchief to her eyes.

“You shock me!” she said, withdrawing it; “you shock me! I could not have believed this of Joseph; I could not have believed it of her—so young, so childish, so early perverted; it is dreadful.”

“But it is not over yet,” said Isabella—“oh, no, it is not over yet. If William will not do me justice, I will avenge myself. What! shall these two have laughed at me—as I know they

have—shall they have acted a mean, treacherous part, and made me both their dupe and their victim? Shall Isabella Osborne have been good enough to console Auguste de Launay for the loss of Mr. Osborne's wife? Shall she have been secretly scorned to her by him, and shall she not have revenge? What! she dares to call him the one beloved of her heart?—she dares to write it, and then to marry my brother, and brave me with the sight of his infatuated love?—let her—let her!”

She spoke in a voice tremulous with passion. Mrs. Osborne sighed deeply.

“Isabella,” she said, “the past is beyond recall. Let William believe in the exclusive love of his wife; we must not disturb his peace of mind with unavailing revelations. Let her enjoy her husband's affection; that she should lose it would do you no good; it would not make it less cruel to remember how cruelly you have been deceived and trifled with. Endurance is the lot of all.”

“It shall not be my lot,” said Isabella, springing to the door of her brother's room; but before her hand had touched it, that door had opened, and Mr. Osborne stood on the threshold facing his sister. He had not heard all, but he had heard enough to call him up from his sick bed.

“Isabella, what have you been saying?” he asked sternly.

“The truth,” she boldly replied. “The letters of Adèle to Monsieur de Launay are in Joseph's drawer.”

“Where are they?” he exclaimed, with passionate resentment; “give them to me this moment.”

“Ask them from Joseph yourself,” said Isabella, turning away proudly.

Mr. Osborne looked at his stepmother.

“Madame,” he said, “ask these letters from your son in my name.”

“I shall,” replied Mrs. Osborne. “For Heaven's sake, William, leave us. Isabella, obey me; leave the room this moment.” She stepped between them. “You shall have those letters, I promise that you shall,” she added, addressing Mr. Osborne.

“See that you keep your word,” he replied with something like menace in his tone. He re-entered his room, and closed the door on himself.

“Isabella, what have you done?” cried Mrs. Osborne. “Heaven help us! strife, family strife, division, hatred, animosity, surround me—me the most pacific of women. You have put me

in such a position that I must, whether I like it or not, act against that unfortunate girl. Leave the room. I am displeased with you, Isabella, deeply displeased."

"See that you keep your word to him," said Isabella; and without deigning to say more, she left the apartment.

Mrs. Osborne withdrew her handkerchief from her eyes and rang the bell; Jean answered it.

"Where is Capitaine Joseph?" she asked.

Jean answered that Capitaine Joseph was smoking in his room.

"Ask him to go and wait for me in the drawing-room, and when he is there, come and tell me."

Jean withdrew; in a quarter of an hour he returned with the intimation that Monsieur le Capitaine was waiting in the drawing-room for Madame.

Mrs. Osborne did not look up from the book she was reading; she merely said, "Very well," and turned a page; Jean closed the door; Mrs. Osborne leisurely put her book aside, rose, took a small flat candlestick from the table and lit it, gave a careful look around her, and finally left the room, and closed and locked the door.

With calm and silent step she crossed the corridors, she passed through the rooms, she went up and down the staircase that had until then known only the light and joyous foot of Adèle running to seek her husband. She reached the main staircase, she noiselessly passed the drawing-room door, she never paused until she reached the room of Capitaine Joseph. The evil star of Adèle was in the ascendant, the door was not locked. Mrs. Osborne entered and gave a rapid look around; there was but one table, and it had but two drawers. At once she went to it; she opened the uppermost, she seized on a small packet of letters, she looked at the writing. Yes, this was what she wanted. She went to the door, drew the bolt, then leisurely took a chair, and holding up her little flat candlestick—her sight was not very good—she began reading.

Capitaine Joseph waited in the drawing-room until his patience was exhausted, until he swore between his teeth, with an oath which we need not repeat, that he would wait no longer. He went back to his apartment, resolved that neither requests nor messages should withdraw him from it, but to his amazement the door which he had left open resisted all his efforts. Capitaine Joseph felt in a bad temper, and he had withdrawn his right leg to bestow on the culprit a vigorous kick, when his in-

tentions were anticipated, the door was unlocked from within, and Mrs. Osborne appeared, and very calmly said—

“Come in, Joseph.”

Joseph did not go in, he bounced in, red as a turkey-cock. He gave the open and empty table-drawer a rapid look, and trembling with passion, he cried—

“Madame, Madame, what have you been doing here?”

“My duty,” she solemnly replied.

Capitaine Joseph cooled down at once. He placed a chair by the door, and riding it according to his favourite fashion, he said phlegmatically—

“I must trouble you for those letters.”

“Joseph, you are a fool!” said his mother, with calm scorn.

“If I did not wish to see you, to speak to you,—if I were not quite ready to account for my conduct, you would not find me here waiting for you.”

“Humph!” he sceptically observed. “I was waiting below.”

“What tempted that unhappy girl to repose trust in you?” pursued his mother; “a friend like you is worse than an enemy. Why did you keep those letters, and not give them to her at once, or burn them? Why did you leave them here in your table-drawer for Isabella to see them and rush off with the intelligence to William, who, let him disguise it as he may, is exasperated with secret jealousy? Joseph, Joseph, you have been the worst enemy Adèle ever had.”

Capitaine Joseph bit his moustache and looked as he felt, very much piqued. He had been pluming himself the whole evening on the address with which he had obtained these letters from Monsieur de Launay; he had quietly enjoyed, by anticipation, the start, the mixture of fright, surprise, and joy, with which Adèle would find them on her table that night; he had, with the mind's vision, seen her beautiful eyes swim with grateful tears; he was not even without some expectation of finding, on arriving in Paris, a little note tender though short, beginning with “Best of friends,” and expressing in guarded language the feelings of a young and ardent heart;—and this was the end.

“She holds me her foe, and I am her best friend,” continued Mrs. Osborne; “I sacrifice myself to save her. I had promised William that he should have those letters.”

“Madame,” cried Capitaine Joseph.

“And he shall never see them,” she resumed; “I have burned them.”

She pointed, as she spoke, to a heap of black ashes on the floor.

Capitaine Joseph shook his head sceptically.

"Perhaps you committed a mistake," he suggested; "burned something else instead."

"You are insolent," said Mrs. Osborne, reddening; "but chance gives me the power of convincing you. They are but half burned; the fragments that remain are still sufficient to convince William, too, if you choose to show them to him."

"We shall see that," coolly replied Capitaine Joseph.

He picked up the half-burned letters from the floor; he looked at them attentively; they certainly were the same he had received from Monsieur de Launay. He recognized the writing, the paper, and a few words which he had read here and there, left him no doubt of their identity. Without comment, he took a match, lit it, and finished the work of destruction which Mrs. Osborne had begun.

"Had you done that sooner," she said, severely, "you would have spared much evil that is now beyond remedy."

She went to the door. On the threshold she paused, and observed—

"I do not advise you to go near William—he has the small-pox."

"The small-pox!" cried Capitaine Joseph, horrified, "Ah! bah!"

"The small-pox," she repeated, and she left the room.

She had said enough. Capitaine Joseph forgot Adèle—her letters—her fate. Mr. Osborne had the small-pox, and Capitaine Joseph could not pack up too quickly, and leave the house too soon. Dawn, however, glimmered in the sky before he could procure one of the three carriages which, out of excess of caution, he had sent for in various directions. At length one was found; it stood waiting at the gate of the Manor. Eagerly was Capitaine Joseph going to leap into it, when a fair, but firm hand kept him back.

"Where are you going?" asked the irate voice of Isabella behind him.

"To Paris—and I advise you to accompany me."

"Where are the letters?"

"What letters?"

"Her letters;—where are they?"

"Burned. Are you coming?"

"Burned. You burned them!"

"Will you come or will you not?"

"Joseph, you will repent it yet."

"Let Madame Osborne repent it if she likes—it was her doing. You will repent staying here. I will wait—yes, I will wait five minutes for you."

To this magnanimous offer Isabella returned no reply. She was gone.

"Tant pis pour elle," grumbled Capitaine Joseph, as he entered the carriage, which rapidly drove away. "I made a fair offer. The small-pox—I always had a bad opinion of that man."

CHAPTER LVI.

A DEPARTURE.

"THEY are all conspiring against me," thought Isabella, trembling with passion. "She promised him those letters, and she burns them!—burns them to screen her and condemn me! True. Of what use can the slighted, despised, jilted daughter be? The loved wife is all-powerful; to her due court must be paid."

She entered her room, from which the sounds of Capitaine Joseph's departure had drawn her; she closed the door with a passionate violence, that made it ring again; she threw herself in an arm-chair like a whirlwind; and with an amazed start she beheld Adèle, who stood before her, cold and pale.

An angry "What do you want?" rose to Isabella's lips, but had not time to pass them. Adèle anticipated the question by declaring her purpose.

"I came here to speak to you," she said; "you were absent, and I waited for your return; and now I tell you, Isabella, that I will not leave this room without knowing the truth from you."

"And pray why should I tell it to you?"

"You are my enemy, my deadly enemy," replied Adèle, raising her slight hand, "you hate me; *you* will tell me the truth, if no one else will."

Isabella folded her arms sulkily, and did not reply.

"Isabella," pursued her sister-in-law, "you know what is going on in this house; you told me yesterday morning that I might learn it yet. You spoke the truth—but I have learned it

in riddles. Something dreadful hangs over us all; but what it is no one will tell me. I meet averted glances, I hear broken words, and I feel," she added, pressing her hand to her head, "that unless I know more, it will make me mad. What was there in that letter?" she resumed, with sudden impetuosity, "what was there in it? You know—she knows—every one knows—and not I! What was it, I say?"

Miss Osborne did not answer; she rose to leave the room; but Adèle was at the door before she could reach it; she laid her back to it, she stretched her arms across it, and she faced her sister-in-law with an aspect so deadly pale, with such despair and wildness in it, that Isabella stepped back half frightened.

"You shall not leave this room," said Adèle, "until I know that woful secret. You are my accuser; you have robbed me of all I had—my husband's love and esteem; you can but break my heart. Speak, I tell you, speak!"

Strong passion is a spell that rules the most rebellious spirits, and Isabella felt compelled to answer this passionate adjuration.

"I have nothing to tell you," she said; "since you know about Monsieur de Launay's letter, you know as much as I do; for, of course," she added, smiling bitterly, "you have seen it; your friend Joseph showed it to you."

"He did not. Oh, tell me all—do not spare me."

"And what is there to tell you?" moodily replied Isabella. "Some one sent the letter to William, who insulted me because he thought it was meant for me, whereas it concerned his wife."

"No, no—he does not—he cannot believe that," cried Adèle, passionately; "he does not believe it."

"He does not believe it!" said Isabella, whose temper was rising; "are you mad? Not believe it, when Monsieur de Launay confesses all!"

"My word shall prevail over his," said Adèle, clasping her hands. "He may slander me; my husband will be my defender."

Isabella laughed with thorough scorn.

"And your letters—those letters which Monsieur de Launay gave to your friend Joseph, which not two hours ago, and in my presence, William made mamma promise to bring to him—do you think he believes it after that?"

"Letters! what letters?"

"What letters! your letters."

"My letters! where are they?"

"She burned them."

"Burned! they are burned?"

"So Joseph told me before going."

"He is gone; are you sure he is gone?"

"Am I sure I am here?"

"And they are burned—really burned?"

"Really burned."

Adèle wrung her hands.

"Ay, truly you have kind friends. Your husband knows from me that they existed, but his eye shall never behold them."

"Isabella," said Adèle, "you are dreaming, or you have been deceived. I never wrote love-letters to any one, and he knows it. He would laugh at any one that would tell him so."

"The girl is crazy," said Isabella, with something like compassion. "Laugh! I promise you he did not laugh, when he ordered, more than he asked, mamma to bring them to him."

"You saw him—you saw him yourself. You spoke to him—you heard him."

"Of course I did."

"But when—when?"

"Not two hours ago, I tell you."

"And he will not see me," said Adèle, with an accent full of woe; "he will not see me."

She said no more, but opened the door and left the room of Isabella. She went back to her own room; Jeannette was there waiting, with troubled aspect, for her mistress. Jeannette had a firm mind, but she was old, and that wild night, as she called it, was too much for her. She was distracted between her fear for the health of her mistress, and her dismay at the woe into which she saw her so suddenly fallen. "How shall I keep her from Mademoiselle Lilian," she thought, "when she knows she is ill? how shall I prevent her from breaking her heart about Monsieur. If she could only see him! But good heavens! am I mad! she must not see him! It is enough to make one mad, it is. And they are all in a league against her, poor lamb, all against her."

Her thoughts had reached this point when Adèle stood by her side.

"It is drawing to a close," she said. "Yes, Jeannette; it will soon be all over. He has sent me word to leave this house, and I have promised to give him that gratification."

"Oh, Madame, it is out of affection, out of love," interrupted Jeannette, "Monsieur is ill, and——"

"And do you believe that?" in her turn interrupted Adèle. "Ay, he is very ill, but his illness is wrath. His stepmother,

his sister can see him, but not his wife. He has tried, through Docteur Guillaume, to make me believe that he is ill; but I know better."

"Oh, Madame—Mademoiselle Lilian——" began Jeannette; but she stopped short, and Adèle, who had not heard her, went on:—

"Jeannette, his illness is, that his love is turned into hate—that his wife is his wife no more."

"Ah, Madame, Madame, do not say such dreadful things, do not look so wild."

"Do I look wild?" asked Adèle, looking at her pale image in the glass, "or have you too joined my enemies? He used to think that I looked handsome. Well, I am losing time; give me the key."

"What key, Madame?"

Adèle fixed on her a piercing look.

"You know well enough what key I mean," she replied; "the key which you have hidden so well that I could not find it. The key of the room next to that where he is sleeping. I must see him before I go; oh, yes, I must see him."

"I have not got it," said Jeannette.

"You have it, Jeannette; give it to me."

"I have not got it," said Jeannette again.

"Jeannette, I shall never forgive you."

"I have not got it," persisted the old woman.

"I shall never forgive you," cried Adèle, "and do you know what it is to be unforgiven?"

Jeannette groaned and wrung her hands.

"I tell you it would drag down the blessed from heaven, if anything unforgiven could enter there."

"I have not got it," said Jeannette, with apathetic monotony.

It was useless to insist. Jeannette was fixed in her denial; arguments, threats, entreaties, would have no power over her.

"Be it so," cried Adèle. "I tell you I shall see him."

She left the room; she ran down stairs, her brain was on fire, her thoughts met in one point and could not move from that. Seeing nothing, feeling nothing, she went straight to her husband's study. The door was locked within; she knocked, it opened, and Mrs. Osborne appeared on the threshold.

"I want to see my husband," said Adèle; "I shall leave the house. Oh, yes, you may be sure I shall; but I must see my husband before I go."

"You cannot," replied Mrs. Osborne. "I have passed my

word that you should not enter his room, and you shall not whilst I guard his door."

Fate never spoke more sternly.

"You have had two husbands," said Adèle bitterly; "did you love neither? Do you know what you are doing? But what do I ask—are you not doing it all? Yet I will forgive you everything, even to the letter you sent and the letters you burned, if you will but let me see him one moment."

As well pray to a stone. The face of Mrs. Osborne remained inexorable and cold. Adèle sunk on her knees before her, and seized her hand.

"Let me see him," she said, "before it is too late, and he himself will bless you again and again for having disobeyed him."

"You pain me," said Mrs. Osborne, leaving the door and entering the study; "you pain me."

Adèle did not heed her. She sprang in through the door which Mrs. Osborne had left open, to the door of her husband's room. She shook it wildly, but it resisted all her efforts.

"William," she cried, "William, let me in, let me in."

No voice answered her. She called again and again with pathetic entreaty.

"Let me in. Speak to me—one word—but one."

And all was silent as death.

"You see," said Mrs. Osborne, who stood looking on, "you see yourself that he does not wish to see you—that I am innocent of it all. He is angry and irritated now, but with time, who knows—who can tell?"

Adèle did not heed her. She stood leaning against the door of her husband's room like one stricken; her arms fell lifeless by her sides, her head sank on her bosom, tears rushed from her eyes and flowed down her pale cheeks.

"All is over," she said, looking up and speaking in a low, dreary voice, "all is over. The world is ended, the husband forsakes the wife he has wedded—all is over."

She turned away, and slowly left the room. Mrs. Osborne followed her to lock the door, but was prevented by the sudden entrance of Isabella.

"What do you want here?" severely asked her mother; "is it not enough that William and Lilian have the small-pox—do you want to get it too, perverse girl?"

Isabella drew back three steps.

"The small-pox!" she said; "he has the small-pox?"

"Do you mean to say you did not know it?" calmly asked her mother.

Isabella's blue eyes kindled with wrath.

"You knew it, and let me stay here talking an hour to you and him," she cried; "no, there never was any thing like it—never."

"If I were you I should leave the house at once," coolly said Mrs. Osborne; "there are two carriages below, take one and go off to Anna. For my part, I fear nothing; I remain."

It exasperated Isabella to have to follow this advice, not to be able to stay and have a quarrel with her mamma; but fear proved stronger than temper.

"I know you hate me," she said, bursting into tears; "I know you do." She left the room, however.

"What a fool that girl is!" thought Mrs. Osborne; "she has had it twice, and she is actually afraid of it still. Patience truly, patience."

Miss Osborne fled on the wings of terror to look for Jean. She was audacious, but not brave. She felt as if she never could be too soon out of the house.

"A carriage!" she imperatively cried; "send for a carriage at once!"

"There are two below, this hour," groaned Jean; "Monsieur le Capitaine sent for three, and the two that came last will not go without being paid, and Madame, to whom I have been twice, will not pay either. Mademoiselle can have whichever she pleases."

Isabella ran up to her room to pack up, or rather tumble, a few things into a trunk, then she sat down upon it, and vowed she would not go.

"It is all a trick," she murmured moodily, "all a trick to get me out of the way. He was pale as death when I saw him—he had not a pimple on his face. I do not believe it."

She rose and emptied the trunk of its contents; then, crying with vexation at her own cowardice, she put them back. What if the small-pox that showed itself least externally were by some fatal chance the most contagious?

"I must go," she thought, "I will go; but woe to them all if they are cheating me."

With this prophetic denunciation she decided on departure.

Jean was wondering which carriage she would have, and by what magic he could allay the wrath of the rejected coachman, when his little mistress appeared before him, and said in a low voice—

"Jean, send for a carriage for me, if you please."

"There are two at the door," replied Jean, very much surprised at the sudden demand in which carriages were; "and Madame can have whichever she pleases."

"Either will do," she answered, and leaving him in silent wonder and perplexity, Adèle ascended the staircase and returned to her room. She entered it silently; without looking at Jeannette, she said—

"Give me my brown frock."

"Does Madame mean her violet taffetas?" hesitatingly suggested Jeannette.

"Give me my brown frock," said Adèle again; "the brown frock I took off the night before I was married."

"Madame! Madame!" gasped Jeannette, greatly alarmed, for Adèle was undressing; she was taking off the silk skirt and white body she had kept since the preceding evening, she was taking off the chain from around her neck, the earrings from her ears, the rings from her fingers.

"Give me my brown frock," said Adèle again; "tell him I kept nothing but my wedding ring; that is mine; it is the price of youth and liberty given in vain; the rest is his. Poor as I came to him, I shall leave him."

"I shall go mad!" groaned Jeannette, yet she obeyed, and helped her mistress to dress. "I shall go mad!" she cried, raising her clasped hands above her head. "Madame! Madame! take off that old thing and put on your silk dress. Monsieur wishes you to leave, because to stay might be your death; but you are his wife, and he loves you dearly."

Adèle laughed a low, dreary laugh.

"I called to him for one word—but one; in silence he scorned me. You will say he was asleep—asleep! *his* lightest whisper would at any time have wakened me from the deepest slumbers. No, no, it is all over. Tell him I forgave him—yes, you may tell him that."

"Madame, do not go—stay. I think I am getting really mad—no, I mean go by all means, but have patience. Believe all this is some sad mistake. Is it possible you do not understand that it must be made all clear, that lies cannot last?"

"Oh, yes, I know that," replied Adèle, calmly; "yes, I know he will learn and rue his sad error. I know his love will return to me as the stream to its channel; but where will be the use? I shall be dead then."

"People do not die so easily, Madame."

"The heart dies when the body lives. I feel mine growing

very cold; but let that rest. This is the key of my jewel-box; keep it carefully, and give it to him; there are many valuable things in it; he was fond of making me presents when he liked me. They will do for Lilian."

"And where is Madame going?" asked Jeannette, faintly.

"I shall go to Alice."

Jeannette rocked herself to and fro; "I shall never get over this," she thought, "never. If I try to keep her, it may be her death. If I let her go, it will break her heart."

She felt distracted, yet a sort of vague hope, of confused plan, offered itself to her mind. Could she not, when Adèle was gone, see Mr. Osborne, and do something?—tell him, for instance, not to let them kill his wife? Mr. Osborne was not, indeed, a man to meddle with, but desperate evils need desperate remedies.

"Good-bye, Jeannette," said Adèle, "good-bye! The sun is rising; it is time to go."

"Ah, Madame, it is very early."

"It was earlier on my wedding morning."

"Ah, Madame, in that old brown frock! Ah, Madame!"

Adèle clasped her hands, and burst into tears.

"Would I were again the little girl who wore it!" she cried; "*she* had a faithful friend, a true friend, and I have none—none—yes, Jeannette, tell him that when you see him; say his wife went away poor, solitary as on that morning;—but no, say nothing; his heart will be sore enough without it. Good-bye, I say, good-bye! Never again shall I enter this house—never—never!"

She left the room; she passed by Lilian's door, and shook her head.

"She is not mine," she said, with a swelling heart. "I shall not waken her this morning, as I did that day when I kissed her, and cried so sorely."

Jeannette groaned, but said nothing. Adèle spoke no more until she reached the door of the Manor. They had met no one; Jeannette alone had followed her mistress downstairs, and now stood with her on the threshold of the house. The sun had not long risen, a red and burning shield in a chill sky; the road was wet with the night dew; the grass glittered; the trees looked heavy and cold; mists moved on the lake.

Miss Osborne was gone, and the remaining carriage stood waiting; but Adèle lingered on the threshold like one unable to move; her head was sunk, her hands were clasped. What bitter and woful thoughts were with her then? Jeannette saw and

watched a strange storm pass over her pale face; she saw her bosom heave, her hands wrung convulsively.

"Madame, Madame!" she said, imploringly.

Adèle turned on her sharply.

"You shall find out nothing," she said, "nothing."

And leaving Jeannette amazed, she entered the carriage, which drove away.

CHAPTER LVII.

VICTORY.

Mrs. OSBORNE watched it until it vanished; she stood on the balcony of the central drawing-room window. Openly she exulted over the defeated foe. Her blue eye had unusual light; a bright spot burned on her cheek; her lip smiled with calm triumph. She had prevailed; Fortune had aided her; nothing had opposed—everything had favoured her; it was over: the self-banished wife had left her mistress of the battle field.

For once the insolence of victory conquered the calmness of this self-possessed lady. She rang; Mathieu appeared. Mathieu was Mr. Osborne's servant, of course; but Mrs. Osborne had placed him in the house. He had been powerful during her reign; since Mr. Osborne's marriage Mathieu had fallen in the background. His master did not like him; but, too careless to take the trouble of dismissing him, he was satisfied with making little or no use of him. Mathieu felt he was no favourite; he became sulky. Mr. Osborne at length made up his mind, and gave him warning to leave. Mrs. Osborne now gave him one look—he was a heavy, sullen man, with a low, stubborn forehead—and she felt that Mathieu would do.

"Lock and bolt the front door," she said, "and let no one enter the house without my knowledge."

"Not a soul shall come in," sulkily replied Mathieu.

"When the door is locked, come back here to me."

"She is gone," thought Mrs. Osborne, "gone, foolish girl! To fly is to abdicate. Never shall she enter this house again—never—never! I know him; all is over for her in his heart. She has deceived him. The love-letters are nothing; but the deceit, the falsehood doom her. Wider and wider shall the breach become—all is over."

She walked up and down the room. It was a majestic old apartment, not splendid, but solemn and grave. With silent complacency Mrs. Osborne surveyed the capital of her new empire. Sweet is conquest to all—sweeter was it to her, from having been so long delayed, so hard to win.

"The door is locked and bolted," said Mathieu, reappearing.

"Lock the garden gate."

"Jean has the key."

"Send Jean to me."

In a few minutes, Jean, pale and disturbed—he had not the spirit of Jeannette—stood in the presence of his new mistress.

"Give me the key of the garden gate," she said, severely.

Jean drew the key from his pocket, and laid it on the table.

"Where is the key of the door that leads to the counting-house?"

"Monsieur has that key."

"Very well. My stepson has bought some plate lately; bring me the account of the new and the old. How much wine is there in the cellar?"

"There are two pipes of Burgundy which Monsieur——"

"Bring me the keys," she interrupted—"Stay, I shall go with you. Come, Mathieu, I want you too."

"The world is turned topsy-turvy," thought Jean. Mathieu, we need scarcely say, thought the world was getting round to the right point.

With firm step and steady eye Mrs. Osborne preceded the two servants to the cold, silent room where the plate was kept in an iron safe. With inexorable accuracy she detected that a small silver spoon had been lost; with attentive look she scanned her stepson's new purchases, and finally she took possession, not merely of the cellar keys for which she had asked, but of every key she could get hold of. Followed by Mathieu and Jean, she went over the whole house; within half-an-hour every door was locked, every bolt was drawn, every key was in the care of Mathieu. The apartment Mrs. Osborne visited last was that adjoining Mr. Osborne's room. She looked at the door; it was fast, the key was withdrawn. She looked at Jean.

"Monsieur has that key," he said.

She went to the window; there was but one; twenty feet divided it from the garden; but there were no shutters. Mrs. Osborne frowned.

"A thief could get in with a ladder and rob the whole house," she said; "let the carpenter come at once, Mathieu."

"He shall," said Mathieu solemnly.

There was no more to do; they left the room; Mrs. Osborne locked it herself, and merely saying to Jean,—

"You need not answer the bell when I ring;" she bade Mathieu follow her to her room.

"And what has passed between them there no one can tell, Mademoiselle Jeannette," solemnly said Jean, as he related the whole to her: "all I can say is this; since the fall of Bonaparte and the battle of Waterloo, there has been nothing like it."

"Oh, the serpent!" cried Jeannette, "oh, the serpent!"

The key she had kept back from Adèle, for the sake of which she had remained behind, was useless; every avenue to Mr. Osborne's room was stopped, and, though he might not know it, the master of Courcelles was a prisoner in his own house.

"I must speak to Docteur Guillaume," thought Jeannette. "God knows what I shall say to him, but something I must say." She resolved to watch for his coming in a little room adjoining that of Lilian, and which overlooked the road; "and though I should stay here the whole day," thought Jeannette, "I shall not leave the window." Vain resolve! She had not been there an hour, when again Jean burst in upon her with wild looks.

"Mademoiselle Jeannette," he cried, "do you believe that people can be possessed with devils? because," he added, without waiting for a reply, "I am sure there is a devil in that fair, handsome Madame Osborne."

"Ay, and one of the worst; you tell me no news, Monsieur Jean."

"But have you seen the room of Mademoiselle Adèle—of Monsieur's wife? Have you seen what she and Mathieu have made of it?" asked Jean; "go and look, go and look."

Jeannette forgot that she was to stay by the window. She started up and ran to the room of her young mistress. The Emperor of China, looking for Aladdin's palace, and seeing but the bare spot on which it had once risen, gorgeous and splendid, did not remain more amazed, more bewildered, than Jeannette on entering that room. All that love had once brought there, hate had cast forth. The bed on which she had slept was gone; the couch where she had rested, the mirror that had reflected back her image, every object she had touched, every elegant trifle he had given her, and she had enjoyed, had vanished; ruthlessly desecrated was this bower of love into a bare stone room, where the garish day entered freely, where the sun shone on cold walls and a dust-stained floor. What could her motive have been?—Was she so sure of prevailing?—Was she guided by a subtle policy that bade

her efface every token of the once-loved presence? Was she mad with success?

The arms of Jeannette fell powerless by her sides, she stared at Jean, who stared at her; at length the old woman spoke,—

"Monsieur Jean," she said, "that woman is mad with wickedness—mad—mad."

And whilst Jeannette was dooming Mrs. Osborne the opportunity fled.

After a long and heavy slumber, Mr. Osborne awoke, and saw his stepmother, who stood mild and grave, at the foot of his bed.

"How do you feel?" she asked.

He did not reply.

"Much worse," he said at length.

"There must have been something in that draught Docteur Guillaume sent to make you sleep," she resumed. "You never awakened once, and when Adèle bade you good-bye at the door, you did not answer."

He gave a start.

"Where is she?" he asked.

"Oh, she is gone this hour; she behaved very sensibly."

"Gone!" he said; "she is gone?"

"Was it not your wish?"

He did not answer. A strange expression of pain passed across his face. He had ardently wished her to go, but he had not thought that she could or would desert the house where he lay ill and suffering.

"And where did she go?" he asked at length.

"To Madame Lascours. It was high time for her to leave. Poor Lilian has been taken ill, too. Do not alarm yourself; Docteur Guillaume says it will be nothing. I shall see that she receives every care."

He turned his head on his pillow; the sick father, the sick child, were both forsaken. Suddenly a frown gathered on his brow; he sat up, he leaned on his elbow, he fixed a stern eye on his stepmother.

"And the letters," he said, "where are they?"

"Burned," she replied, calmly. "Joseph burned them. You cannot blame him."

"And how dare he burn them?" cried Mr. Osborne, trembling with fever and wrath; "where is he?"

"He left early this morning for Paris; his leave of absence was out."

Mr. Osborne sank back exhausted on his pillow. The proof, the certainty he had thought to grasp, had left him once more a prey to tormenting doubt. Suddenly he rallied.

"She left some message for me; she wrote some letter. What!—what are they?" He fixed a keen look on Mrs. Osborne. She bore it without shrinking.

"She left no message—no letter," she replied.

He closed his eyes and sighed.

Mrs. Osborne looked at him for a while, then she said, gently—

"William, can you attend to me?"

He raised his heavy lids, and said: "Speak."

"You are not, thank God for it, in danger; but do you not think, William, it would be right to yourself, to your wife, to your family, to make your will?"

"My will!" he said, with a bitter smile, "I wonder it was not mentioned earlier."

Mrs. Osborne looked injured.

"You wrong me," she said. "Your father made his will at my request. I need not tell you that it was not in my favour; but he made it, and though there was bitterness after he was gone, there was at least peace. I have had the pain to hear resentful words from Adèle; I know she has cruel suspicions. Pray settle this in such a way as to remove them; you have much to settle. Do you give her a life-interest, or the absolute property? Is she to have your child, even in the case of a second marriage? Or, if you do not leave Lilian to her care, to whom do you bequeath her? So much for Adèle; so much for Lilian. Of Isabella, of Anna, I do not speak. I know you do not like them."

"I shall not forget them," interrupted Mr. Osborne, with another bitter smile.

Mrs. Osborne raised her handkerchief to her eyes.

"I have a hundred and seventy pounds a year," she said, with dignity. "I ask, I wish for nothing—for nothing, William, but that by that one simple act, you will put an end to the unseemly contest which has begun by your sick bed, and must not desecrate this hour of trial. I knew you to be firm and courageous, like your father, and therefore I felt I could mention this matter to you."

"You did well," replied Mr. Osborne; but he said no more; he looked wearied of speech, and again closed his eyes.

The tramp of a horse on the road caught Mrs. Osborne's ear quicker than that of Jeannette. She slipped out, admitted Docteur Guillaume herself, and led him to Mr. Osborne at once.

"Lilian is pretty well," she said, "but you will find William much worse, I fear."

"I shall judge for myself," he said, drily.

"Oh! of course."

She ushered him in with the intimation, softly whispered: "Here is Docteur Guillaume, William;" and she waited, standing in the study, until Docteur Guillaume reappeared.

He looked grave.

"How is he?" she asked, anxiously.

"I shall come again this evening," was the only reply he deigned her. "You need not trouble yourself to come up with me. I know the way to the child's room."

But Mrs. Osborne, warned, perhaps, by a secret presentiment of Jeannette's intentions, could not hear of such a thing. She locked Mr. Osborne in, and accompanied Docteur Guillaume to Lilian's room. Mrs. Osborne was extremely anxious about the dear child.

"She will do well enough," shortly said Docteur Guillaume.

"Do you really think so?"

"Of course I do. You do not suppose she is ill, do you?"

"I want mamma," said Lilian, crying.

"I feel so anxious about her, poor darling," pursued Mrs. Osborne; but Docteur Guillaume was already going downstairs, and without troubling herself to answer Lilian's screaming question—"What have you done with mamma?" Mrs. Osborne followed him closely.

If her fair hand had, indeed, been only sufficiently near the poor darling just then, Lilian would have received a most significant reply; but a bird like Docteur Guillaume, with a fowler like Jeannette, were not to be neglected for the sake of any impertinence. The event justified Mrs. Osborne's foresight and prudence; Jeannette stood waiting at the door below, evidently to speak to the Doctor.

"What do you want?" asked Mrs. Osborne, stepping between her and Docteur Guillaume.

"I feel so ill!" said Jeannette, with a moan.

"What ails you?" impatiently asked Docteur Guillaume.

"She has been eating too much fruit," coolly replied Mrs. Osborne.

Jeannette, confounded at the audacity of the invention, found not a word to say.

"Take some hot broth," said Docteur Guillaume. "I shall come again this evening," he added, addressing Mrs. Osborne.

The door opened, he stepped out, mounted his horse, and rode away briskly.

The hopes of Jeannette, which had revived with his last words, died in the birth. Mrs. Osborne closed the door, locked it, and took out the key to her face.

"Are we prisoners, Madame?" resolutely asked Jeannette.

Mrs. Osborne smiled.

"You can leave the house when you like," she said; "but if you leave, you shall not enter it again. The choice is yours."

Jeannette groaned audibly, but confessed herself conquered by retreating. Mrs. Osborne returned to her post in her stepson's study.

The sun was near setting when Docteur Guillaume was again admitted by Mrs. Osborne. With mysterious and decorous gravity, she led him into the Hall, and, assuming a confidential air, she said—

"And how is Adèle?"

"Very well," he drily replied: and he rose.

"No—no, you must not go. Docteur Guillaume, you are a friend of the family, you must undertake the office of a friend to Adèle. I know, poor child, she never would mention the matter to you; but first, have I your word that William shall not know I have mentioned to you the word Will?"

"I hear it for the first time," said Docteur Guillaume, mistrustfully.

"Sick men are so strange," pursued Mrs. Osborne; "he might misjudge his wife if I pleaded her cause. Have I your word that this conversation shall be strictly confidential?"

Docteur Guillaume reflected awhile, and at length he said—

"You have; but pray why speak of Will to Monsieur Osborne? I do not think he is going to die, do you?"

"Heaven forbid! but every illness may take an unfavourable turn. And Adèle has nothing, whilst Lilian is very rich. Does it not seem absurd to add to her ample fortune the Manor of Courcelles and her father's moderate provision, and to leave Adèle destitute?"

"These are arguments I cannot urge," drily said Docteur Guillaume. "I may advise Monsieur Osborne to make his will; more I cannot do."

"And that will suffice," said Mrs. Osborne. "She has nothing, and he knows it."

"Pray is it at her request you speak?" asked Docteur Guillaume.

"Good Heavens, no! how can you so misunderstand me? The poor child knows and feels that she ought not to be left unprovided for; but she would die before she would speak of it in this open-hand, business-like fashion. She is seventeen, Docteur Guillaume, and I am near fifty—there is the difference."

"And you are certain she is unprovided for?"

"I am certain of it."

"I shall advise Monsieur Osborne to make his will," said Docteur Guillaume, in a tone that implied—"I shall do no more."

"That will suffice," she graciously replied, "his heart will do the rest. And now I release you."

She led him to the sick room, but she did not enter it. A low night-lamp burned on a table; its light fell on Mr. Osborne's face. Mrs. Osborne looked at him from the door. He was leaning on one elbow; his left hand supported his flushed cheek, whilst his right, shaking with fever, wrote on a paper which rested on his pillow. He raised his eyes as the door opened; they burned with strange and unusual light; his brow was contracted, his lips were compressed; pain, mental and bodily, was written in his whole aspect; but Docteur Guillaume, by closing the door, shut out the vision. He remained alone with his patient.

"Have you seen her?" eagerly asked Mr. Osborne.

"Of course, I have."

"How is she?"

"Well, to be sure. How are you, rather?"

He felt his pulse, put a few questions, then said, abruptly—

"I speak to a man. You will not think yourself dying if I advise you to make your will?"

"Am I in danger?" asked Mr. Osborne.

"No; but danger is not the right time."

"Very true; and what sort of a will is expected from me?"

Docteur Guillaume rose and said, drily—

"Truth was never welcome yet."

"Indeed, I am very much obliged to you," said Mr. Osborne, "but I repeat it, what sort of a will is it to be? Had I not better, for instance, bequeath my property and my child to my step-mother?"

"You are jesting, sir, and I am in sober earnest," said Dr. Guillaume, gravely. "Make your will, what is it to me to whom you leave your property? Yet if you really ask my advice, I should venture to say, remember that you have a young wife whom your death would leave unprovided for."

Mr. Osborne gave a start. How did Docteur Guillaume know that Adèle was not provided for?

"I have a child, too," he said, coldly.

"Your child is rich, your wife is poor. To right one is not to wrong the other."

"My wife is very young, she might marry again."

"What if she did? You married twice," said the advocate of Adèle.

Mr. Osborne did not look offended; he said calmly,—

"I am much obliged to you for your advice. I shall remember it."

"And that Madame Osborne is unprovided for."

"I shall not forget it. But you are partial. My stepmother is poor; my sisters are portionless. You have not spoken of them, Docteur Guillaume."

"I take interest in no one save Madame Osborne," was the blunt answer.

"Right, Docteur Guillaume. Perhaps she is uneasy on this subject. Of course she has not mentioned anything of the kind to you?"

"Indeed she has not."

"Nor any friend for her?"

Docteur Guillaume coughed and pretended not to hear.

"You saw her to-day?" resumed Mr. Osborne; "did she give you any message for me?"

Madame Osborne did not know I was coming here this evening."

There was a pause; Mr. Osborne broke it by saying—

"Will you do me a great favour, Docteur Guillaume?"

"With pleasure, of course—of course."

"The house of Madame Gérard lies on your way home. Will you take this letter to my wife? Excuse my making you my messenger; I have my reasons."

He took from beneath his pillow the letter he was writing when Dr. Guillaume entered. It was not sealed, but merely folded. Dr. Guillaume said so curtly. Mr. Osborne smiled.

"You would not read it?" he said securely.

"I know nothing about that."

"Well then, I do. I say you would not read it, Docteur Guillaume?"

"Your seal and some sealing-wax, if you please."

Mr. Osborne pointed to a table with a tired look; Docteur

Guillaume sealed the letter, put it in his pocket, drew on his gloves, took his hat, and with a formal,—

"I have the honour to wish you a good evening," he took his leave.

CHAPTER LVIII.

MRS. OSBORNE.

DAY was declining; wild clouds swept wildly across a grey sky; the lake was dark and sullen, the mountains frowned above the road, and the road was solitary. A poet would have said that sorrow brooded over nature, all Docteur Guillaume thought was,—

"Peste! it is going to rain, and I have no umbrella."

He urged his little trotting horse; he was in a great hurry, not merely on account of the rain, but for all sorts of reasons. He had to call upon Madame Lascours and to see Mr. Osborne's wife. "And I shall be bored with questions and nerves," thought Docteur Guillaume. He had to go to Nantua and visit a lady's five sick children, "whose only complaint is gormandizing," grumbled Docteur Guillaume; and finally he had to go home and have his game of draughts with his neighbour the curé. "He has beaten me five times running," thought Docteur Guillaume, "but I have a move in my head. Ah, ha! Monsieur le Curé," he chuckled, "we shall see to-night." Again and again Docteur Guillaume chuckled at his move, and again impatiently urged his little trotting horse.

It is not every one who has as snug a home to go to and as comfortable a housekeeper to welcome him as had Docteur Guillaume. It was a small house, warm in winter, freshened in summer by cool breezes; it had a garden full of roses, wherewith Docteur Guillaume might have bound his brows according to the precepts of his favourite Horace, had not modern fashion forbidden it; and it had, too, what Horace would have liked, and what has luckily remained the fashion of all ages, a cellar stocked with good old wine, choice, pure Burgundy—Docteur Guillaume was a patriot, and scorned Bordeaux—sweet as honey, mellow as the mellowest of fruit, Burgundy which Monsieur le Curé modestly praised as "parfait, excellent," and of which a bottle placed on

a side table with a plate of cakes and raisins, enlivened the game of draughts. Who shall wonder, therefore, that Docteur Guillaume was in a hurry, and had something else to think of than Mr. Osborne and Mr. Osborne's wife?

The Curé was certainly to blame for it all; that move made him take the wrong turn, and Docteur Guillaume had trotted on half a mile before he perceived that the house of Madame Gérard had remained behind him. He felt highly provoked; it was the delay of an hour, yet, to do him justice, he did not hesitate a moment. He turned back briskly, and in twenty minutes he had reached Madame Gérard's door.

It was still the same low house, backed by the mountain that had seemed so sad to Adèle; a grassgrown path led to the door, which stood open; Madame Lascours sat reading, and Madame Gérard sat sewing in the little parlor, which was also the best room of the house. The sound of Docteur Guillaume's horse made them both look up; Madame Lascours smiled; Madame Gérard seemed to be thinking about it.

"How is Madame Osborne?" asked Docteur Guillaume, feeling for the letter, and resolved not to alight.

"Well, I hope," replied Alice.

"I suppose you know?" shortly said Docteur Guillaume.

"No, I do not; I have not seen her for a long time."

Docteur Guillaume felt bewildered.

"Ah! bah!" he said, "I thought," but suddenly remembering that if he said a word more he should be overwhelmed with questions, and amazement, he checked himself in time, and said, "I thought you saw her often? Good evening. We shall have rain!"

He pricked his horse and rode away, before Madame Gérard had discovered that her left ear ached, and that she wanted to know what to do.

Docteur Guillaume felt bewildered at it all. He had told Mrs. Osborne that he had seen Adèle that day, because she was the sort of person he would take a perverse pleasure in deceiving. He had averred the same thing to Mr. Osborne, because he had promised him in the morning to go and see his wife. He had forgotten that promise, but he had not the least doubt Madame Osborne was in perfect health; he would go and see her that evening; and saying he had seen her was no greater harm than setting his watch an hour too fast; besides, it was one of those medical untruths concerning which Docteur Guillaume felt no scruple. Monsieur Osborne was ill, feverish; it would help him to sleep soundly.

But now Docteur Guillaume began to feel that *Monsieur le Curé* was right when he averred there were no white lies—that they were all black, like their father.

“I wish I had gone there this morning,” thought Docteur Guillaume, as he rode back to Courcelles. “It would have spared me a world of trouble.”

He felt annoyed; he also felt perplexed. It was very strange. What was going on in that old Manor, of which *Mrs. Osborne* was portress? What stroke of destiny had fallen in that large, silent house, where the wife left the sick husband and his sick child to the care of a stepmother he did not appear to doat on? Where could that young wife of seventeen, who was little more than a child herself, have flown to?

Docteur Guillaume reached the Manor without having found an answer to these queries. After some slight delay, and some knocking with the butt end of his whip against the gate-like door, a man’s voice growled from within,—

“Who is there?”

“Open, Imbecile.”

“Who are you, I say?”

“You know me well enough; open I say.”

Surly and dogged came the answer:

“Say your name or stay out.”

Docteur Guillaume was in great wrath; but he had lost time enough; he could not lose more for a point of etiquette.

“My name is Docteur Guillaume,” he said angrily, “come to me the next time you break your leg, you ungrateful rascal.”

Bolts were withdrawn; the massive lock grated harshly; the door opened, and the low brow and dark thickset frame of *Mathieu* appeared under the glow of a lamp, which the turnkey of Courcelles held arm high.

“Go to your mistress, sir; and ask her if this is a prison;” stammered forth Docteur Guillaume, pale with passion.

“I know what I am about,” grumbled *Mathieu*. He shewed the Doctor in the Hall, and left him there to digest at his ease the affront he had received.

It was some time before *Mrs. Osborne* came; at length she entered calm and courteous. She gave Docteur Guillaume, who had cooled down to temperate heat, a clear, penetrating look, but she put no questions. He had to begin.

“The fact is,” he said, “it is not necessary of course that *Monsieur Osborne* should know it; but the fact is, that *Madame Osborne*—but I suppose you know where *Madame Osborne* is!”

"She is with her friend Madame Lascours. Did you not see her there to-day?"

"No; she is not there," said Docteur Guillaume wincing. "I have just been there with Mr. Osborne's letter, and she is not and has not been there."

Mrs. Osborne gave a start.

"You alarm me, Docteur Guillaume," she said, "where can she be? She left this morning early—I saw the carriage drive away,—Docteur Guillaume, you must be mistaken; my daughter-in-law is with her friend."

"I tell you she is not—she is somewhere else of course; but there she is not."

Mrs. Osborne sank down on a chair, and clasped her hands.

"This is dreadful," she murmured audibly, "dreadful."

"Why, what can have happened to her?" impatiently asked Docteur Guillaume.

"Ask, rather—what can she have done?" groaned Mrs. Osborne—"unhappy girl—a whole family disgraced!"

She rose, and paced the room to and fro with agitated steps.

Docteur Guillaume opened his mouth and his eyes, and drew a deep breath. He belonged to that circumscribed class of beings whom sorrow has rarely visited, whom passion has never disturbed, whom small cares and small trials surround from their birth to their grave, all else excluding. In many a tragic story, in many a sad, domestic drama, might Docteur Guillaume be an actor, and unless told so, never know it. With difficulty he seized Mrs. Osborne's meaning; with incredulosity, he received it. It was not so much faith in Adèle, though he liked her in his way; it was the strangeness, the impossibility of so violent an infraction to the calm and happy routine of daily life, that made him reject it.

"Ah! bah!" he said, "run away from a good house and a good husband! Ah! bah!"

"Ah, Docteur Guillaume, he has been harsh, and she is passionate."

"Ah! bah! he is fond of her, and she is a good little thing. How would married people amuse themselves if they could not quarrel now and then?"

"It distracts me to think of it."

"Ah! bah!" said Docteur Guillaume, stubbornly, "I will never believe it."

"Nor will I until it is proved to me," replied Mrs. Osborne.

"No, you are right; it is impossible; and yet if you knew all!—I shall send for her in every direction—now, at once."

"It will be time enough to tell Monsieur Osborne to-morrow," observed Docteur Guillaume. "The fact is," he added, a little confusedly, "the fact is, I told him I saw Madame Osborne to-day, and left her well at the house of Madame Gérard, and he gave me this letter for her, which you can send to her when you know where she is. There is no necessity," pursued Docteur Guillaume, "why I should call to-morrow; if he is worse, you can send for me."

"Good evening, Docteur Guillaume," solemnly said Mrs. Osborne, raising her handkerchief to her eyes, "you leave a stricken house."

"Ah! bah! I will never believe it—life is prose, Madame, life is prose! The little thing is gone off to some other friend's. Good evening! I think I shall call to-morrow all the same."

And Docteur Guillaume went off in a hurry that partook more of dismay than of an anxious wish to play his game of draughts with the curé.

Mrs. Osborne, too, flighty as Docteur Guillaume fancied her, thought that life was prose; but she was a woman subtle, keen, and watchful; she could understand what she could not feel, and she knew that prose can have many a deep meaning.

"Where can she be gone to? What can she be aiming at?" thought Mrs. Osborne, standing still in the Hall to meditate; and from an excess of caution, she rang, and inquired of Mathieu, who answered the summons, if he felt sure that the place was really and securely locked.

"There is a band of burglars, I hear," she added, explanatorily.

But Mathieu's reply was satisfactory. A mouse could not creep in unseen, and the bolts were strong. Mrs. Osborné was glad to hear it; the band was a desperate band; one could not be too careful. Mathieu withdrew; Mrs. Osborne took up the letter Docteur Guillaume had left. She looked at the seal, and coolly broke it, and coolly read it.

"Adèle," said Mr. Osborne to his wife, "why did you leave me without a word, written or spoken, of adieu? What have they been saying or doing to you? I will not wrong your faith in me by protestations of affection; you cannot know how much I love you, for I cannot show it; and love is not a tale to be related; but you know I am fond of you, and you know, that if I did not esteem you, I could not love you one hour. Whatever you may hear, believe nothing; whether I live or die, believe nothing that could alienate us in life or in death; believe nothing

save that I love you much, very much—that my trust in you is deep and immovable. Let not the words ‘whether I live or die,’ shock you; I am in no apprehension of death; but who can reckon on a day? I could not be easy without telling you that I made my will a month ago; it is in the hands of Monsieur Ledru, Notary at Nantua. I leave all I have and love to you. Make Lillian good and true like you, and bear with her faults for my sake. I would say more but that I should grieve or alarm you, when there is no need for alarm or grief; besides, I am tired, and can write no longer. Write quickly; your letter will be to me like the sound of your voice, which I have missed this whole day.”

The initials of Mr. Osborne signed this letter, and a significant postscript—“Do not trust every messenger,” closed it.

Mrs. Osborne put it down, and bit her lip.

“He is just like his father,” she thought, “sullen, obstinate, hesitating, irresolute; his father was decisive, it is true, but what matter; they are or were alike. I never could manage the father; and when I think I hold the son, he has slipped through my fingers.”

She read the letter again; the will was a blow, but it was not the worst. The calmness of Mr. Osborne’s epistle seemed to his stepmother more ominous by far. A testament can be annihilated by another testament. Passion can be swayed to the perdition of the loved object, or Othello had never murdered Desdemona because she had lost the mystic handkerchief woven by the Egyptian. But who can prevail over obstinate love and generous faith? Who can persuade a man who will not be persuaded? Who can move one whose very love is tempered by calmness?

“I did well to wait,” thought Mrs. Osborne, moodily; “I did well to wait; now is the time; we shall see what he will say to proof.”

She sealed the letter with her own seal, which resembled his. “He will have something else besides the difference to think of,” she wisely concluded; and with that letter in her hand, she went up to Mr. Osborne’s room.

Several times in the course of the day Mr. Osborne had requested his stepmother to procure him a nurse, or, at least, to let Jeannette wait upon him. Mrs. Osborne had evaded the request with plausible pretences. An excellent nurse was coming, but never came, never having been sent for; Jeannette could not be with her master, for she was unfortunately ill in bed; and calamity,

too, had befallen Jean, he had hurt his foot and could not stir; as for Marie, Lillian's *bonne*, she had plenty to do upstairs; and Mathieu had the whole house to attend to. In short, there was no one left in this stricken house, as Mrs. Osborne justly called it, no one who could give Mr. Osborne a glass of water, save Mrs. Osborne herself.

The sudden and absolute solitude in which he found himself, struck Mr. Osborne as suspicious and strange, and in a voice and with a manner that expressed his feelings, he now inquired, as his stepmother entered his room, if the nurse were come, and why she was not coming.

"I shall send for her again," said Mrs. Osborne, with a sigh. "Docteur Guillaume has just called—he has left a letter for you."

She approached the bed as she spoke; there was much at stake, and Mrs. Osborne was in no sense a timid woman. She sighed again, and she repeated—

"Yes, he has left a letter for you; here it is."

With slight though visible emotion Mr. Osborne held out his hand, Mrs. Osborne hesitated.

"It is not a reply," she said, "it is your own letter. Docteur Guillaume did not see Adèle; she is not with Madame Lascours."

"Where is she gone to?" quickly asked Mr. Osborne.

Mrs. Osborne shook her head.

"No one knows."

"Pshaw!" he said impatiently; "Madame Lascours must know."

"Oh, but she has not been there at all," observed his stepmother; "she left Courcelles early this morning in a carriage, and she did not go to her friend Alice."

"Excuse me, she did; Docteur Guillaume saw her there."

"Docteur Guillaume said that to pacify and please you. It is he himself," she added, looking at him steadily, "who has given me the information I give you. Adèle has not been to Madame Lascours, to-day."

A livid pallor overspread Mr. Osborne's face.

"Good God! where is she, then?" he groaned, in strange anguish; "where is she? where can she be? Send for her everywhere, for God's sake lose no time. Where is Jean? where is Mathieu? send Jeannette here to me."

"Jean and Mathieu are both gone," replied Mrs. Osborne, with a calmness which the goddess of Truth might have envied. "I ought, perhaps, to have waited for their return to tell you, but

I could not. Jeannette is too ill to come here; besides, she knows nothing."

"But where can she be?" exclaimed Mr. Osborne, with a sort of despair; "what have you been doing to her?" he added, fixing on his stepmother a keen and angry eye.

"Nothing," firmly replied Mrs. Osborne; "nothing, William, on my honour. And if, like Adèle, you suspect me in your heart of having sent the anonymous letter that has caused all this mischief, you wrong me. I am incapable, whatever you and she may think, of so cruel an act of treachery."

All the blood seemed to have forsaken Mr. Osborne's pale face. He started up from his pillow, and leaned on one elbow.

"Who has told her about that letter?" he cried; "who has dared to tell her?"

Mrs. Osborne did not answer.

"I thought myself the master of this house," continued Mr. Osborne, trembling with resentment; "I thought no one would presume to mention to my wife a matter she should never have learned save from me. I ask again, who has dared to tell her?"

"I have not opened my lips to her on the subject," coldly said Mrs. Osborne, "and do my judgment the justice of thinking that I would not commit such a blunder."

"Then it is, it must be Isabella."

"It is not; I taxed her with it, and she denied it indignantly. I need not tell you that Isabella's word is to be believed. I can even assure you that Capitaine Joseph is innocent. He gave me his word of honour that he had never mentioned the subject to Adèle.

"But who can have told her?" he angrily persisted; "who, save you three, knew it?"

There was a pause, brief but emphatic.

"Monsieur de Launay knew it, too," deliberately said Mrs. Osborne.

"Well," said Mr. Osborne.

"Well," she echoed boldly, "he could write and warn her."

"He—he—do you know what you are saying?"

"I do; I say he could write to her. Would it be the first time that he has done so?"

The sting went home. The shaft was too keen not to pierce. He gnawed his lip, he grasped the sheet with convulsive hand.

"She never got that letter," he said at length; "Monsieur de Launay is either a miserable intriguer or a miserable dupe."

"William, you are too generous, too trusting. I do not wish

to make myself the accuser of that unhappy girl. I will not exaggerate her folly, for it is no more; but I say you are too generous, too trusting. I say, she has deceived you."

"Take care," he said, in a low voice, "take care."

"I know what I am saying."

"Remember of whom you speak."

"I remember it; and do you remember that Monsieur de Launay wrote more than one letter; that there were replies which have been burned, it is true, but which once existed?"

Mr. Osborne had sunk back on his pillow, he looked steadily at his stepmother.

"Once for all, drop this," he sternly said.

"I will not. I say you are too generous, too trusting. Where is Adèle? Who told her about that letter? Where is she? Why has she fled from the house where she has left her sick husband and his sick child? Why is she not where she said she would be, with the only friend she has? Where is she fled, I ask again? To whom—with whom?"

Mr. Osborne looked at her as if he would read her very soul, but he did not answer.

"Monsieur de Launay is gone to Belgium," said Mrs. Osborne. "Gone or going."

"You have overshot the mark," said Mr. Osborne, calmly, though he had never felt in a greater passion. "You have succeeded in insulting me, and how can I resent it? You are a woman—you are my father's widow! You have, I say, succeeded in insulting me, but know, once for all, that it is puerile, that it is foolish to attempt to move me where Adèle is concerned. Modesty is in her soul, Truth on her lips, and Honour in her heart. Your accusations are not an insult to her, for her they cannot reach; but they are an insult, and a gross one, to me—to my common sense as a man, to my judgment as a husband."

"William, I pity you," said Mrs. Osborne; "but you have left me no choice, you must be convinced. I do not know, indeed, where Adèle is, and I will say no more on that subject; but I repeat it, she has deceived you cruelly and shamefully, and I will prove it."

"I defy you," said Mr. Osborne, with a smile full of scorn.

Without answering, Mrs. Osborne left the room.

"Oh, God, where is she!" he murmured, returning to that tormenting thought. "What have they been doing to her?—Where is she?"

Visions full of horror passed before him. He saw her drown-

ing in the lake, and heard her last cry; he saw her floating on its still waters, white and dead. Agony grasped his heart like an iron hand. He tried to rise, and fell back powerless; fever and weakness, stronger than chains of adamant, bound him to his sick bed. Adèle might be dead or dying, she might, in her despair, have cast herself into the lake; she might have fled to where he never could find her, and he was powerless to save or follow. An "Oh, God help her!" full of woe, was all that remained to him in that bitter hour—the bitterest he had ever known.

CHAPTER LIX.

A MEETING.

DOCTEUR GUILLAUME left the Manor very much disturbed. He felt positively uncomfortable; but so unusual a mood could not last; he soon returned, like a good thermometer, to his natural equilibrium, and trotted on grumbling to himself. "There are some people who must always get on the stilts of life, and rant and rave. Ah, bah! life is prose from beginning to end. Prose, prose," thought Docteur Guillaume, musing. A heavy shower of rain confirmed him in this opinion.

It is raining fast. Do not tell Docteur Guillaume, who is wet, and out of temper with having been delayed by Mr. Osborne's business, and been made a postman of—do not tell him that life has very sad prose—do not talk to him of hearts which sorrow will break and wrong drive to despair. An umbrella would be infinitely more welcome than all your preaching; his game of draughts in his quiet home, with his pleasant neighbour, the curé, would be worth all your arguments.

But now the rain has ceased; the sky has cleared a little; glimmers of light pierce it; the shining of many a new-formed pool on the miry road, warns the Doctor against many a splash; he picks his way slowly and cautiously, and reaches the two cross roads where once already this evening he took the wrong turn.

"Attention!" says Docteur Guillaume, and he pauses; not that, with that move of the curé's out of his head, there was much danger of mistake. The road to Courcelles was broad, and skirted the lake; the path that crossed it was a path and no more, and it went up to the mountain

Docteur Guillaume was not a superstitious man—at least he often said so, and who had so good a right to know as he had? But his childhood had heard and believed in strange stories. He had had cold terrors on him in passing certain spots, shudders and horrors which he still remembered now that his head was grey. The two cross roads where the suicide Pierre was buried, and the spirit of Catherine sat, had ever been to him a place of awe, and not without reason: twice, and most distinctly in the gloom of evening, he had seen Catherine sitting in her favourite haunt. He had seen her wringing her hands and making a silent moaning, that convulsed her pale face with woe, and did not pass forth in sound from her white lips. Once he had fled, and once he had fainted.

Docteur Guillaume had outgrown those childish fears; he had learned that either his sight or his digestion must have been out of order at the time of the spectral vision; but somehow or other he never passed by the two cross roads without a sort of twinge, and he never passed by them at night when he could possibly help it. He now reined in his little horse to take breath, he wiped his moist brow, and he said to himself, "Docteur Guillaume, you are an old fool."

Was it a reality, was it a vision that made him give that sudden start and turn sick and cold? He saw a dark figure like that of a woman standing beneath the dark tree that marked where the two roads met. It moved, it came towards him, it stood by his horse, it spoke. "Docteur Guillaume, how is he?"

Docteur Guillaume breathed relieved; it was no ghost; it was Mr. Osborne's wife.

"Well, Madame," he said testily, "you have done a pretty thing; here am I out at this hour of the night in the rain on your account."

"Docteur Guillaume, how is he?"

"Worse," bluntly replied Docteur Guillaume; he had enough of not telling the truth for that evening.

"Worse!" she moaned. "Is he very ill?"

"Indeed he is."

"Is he in danger?"

"He is, but we will get him out, with God's help."

She seized his hand, and pressed it fervently between her own.

"And now, Madame," said Docteur Guillaume, "will you tell me, in the name of wisdom, why you are walking or running about the country instead of being with your friend?"

"You are mistaken, Docteur Guillaume. I have not been running about the country. I have spent this sad day in the house of a poor woman; I paid her well for the use of her room; I sat by the window watching for you, Docteur Guillaume."

"Watching for me, Madame!"

"I saw you pass this evening; but it was too light, and there were men on the road; you were coming from Courcelles. I saw you pass again; but a child showed you her arm which was hurt. I knew you would return, and it would be dark then, so I stole out at dusk and waited here."

"If you had gone to the house of your friend, Madame, you would have learned quicker news of your husband, and you would have avoided some unpleasantness."

"Friend!" she cried, "I have no friend. I have but one, and he, God help me, is on a sick bed."

Docteur Guillaume could not see her, but in the silence of the night he heard her weeping.

"Well, Madame," he said, "your mind is satisfied now. We can go to Madame Lascours's. She will be in bed, I dare say, but we will waken her up, for there you must sleep."

"I will not trust her," said Adèle, in a clear, determined voice. "I will trust none, friend or foe. I thought they would make me mad this morning. I thought my heart must break. They all united to deceive me, and they nearly succeeded, for the young are credulous, passionate, and easily worked to their ruin; but God was with me, and if I sank for a moment, yet my faith in him was stronger than their malice, and now I feel what I have always felt. He is my anchor and my strength: I can lean on him and defy them all."

"But, Madame," said Docteur Guillaume, "that need not prevent you from sleeping at Madame Gérard's?"

"I shall spend this night at the Manor of Courcelles," quietly said Adèle.

"Madame!"

"I tell you, Docteur Guillaume, that I shall not spend one night out of my husband's house."

"Ah," said Docteur Guillaume, "very well!" He added—"We are only half a league off. I shall have the pleasure of escorting you home. Can you ride behind me? The road is wet for your little feet."

The horse was low, and Adèle was agile; she stepped up on a stone; in a second she was behind him. Docteur Guillaume turned his horse's head, and moaned internally—"I shall not get home to-night."

They rode on for a little while in silence, then the soft, childish voice of Adèle spoke sweetly in the old Doctor's ear—

"Docteur Guillaume, you know I have always liked you very much; you have always been so kind to me; you are like a father to me, indeed you are; but after your goodness and your kindness to-night, I will like you a great deal more."

"I am only doing my duty," roughly said Docteur Guillaume; "you owe me no thanks; I would much rather be at home than here. Do you know how often I have trotted up and down this road to-day, Madame?—something like six or seven times."

"Dear, good, kind Doctor Guillaume, I shall never forget it. I shall pray for you night and morning. I shall remember you till I die."

Docteur Guillaume reined in his horse, which at once stood still, and said, irefully—

"Madame, you are a coaxing little Syren; but the Goddess of Beauty herself, with her zone around her waist, could not make Docteur Guillaume do what you want him to do. Besides, I am not quite such a simpleton as to forget the past. I remember those leeches six years ago, and all the love and the kisses I was to get for not applying them, and how when I claimed my reward I was laughed at for my pains."

"It was because you confessed you had cheated me, Docteur Guillaume. I did not want the leeches; you know I did not; did I now!"

"Never mind. The lady would do like the little girl, much she would care for Docteur Guillaume when she had got what she wanted out of him. Besides, I will not do it," he added, stubbornly.

"Oh, yes, you will—you will," she pleaded.

"Never, Madame! I take you to the house because I cannot prevent your going there, and you cannot be prevented either from entering your own dwelling; but help you to see him, smuggle you into his room—never, Madame, never! It is bad enough to take you to a place where two persons are ill of a pestilential disease."

"Two! Why, who else is ill?" she asked.

"Mademoiselle Lilian; but she is doing well; it is nothing."

Adèle clapped her hands with a sort of despair.

"Ah!" she cried, "what will he think of me?—what will he think of me? I must see him, Docteur Guillaume; he might die; oh, what would become of me then?—what would become of me?"

"Monsieur Osborne will not die; but I have done my duty; I have advised him to make his will, and I have reminded him that his wife—"

"I shall certainly go mad!" interrupted Adèle; "you dared to speak of a will to him—to talk to him of me? Are you, too, my enemy? Ah, it was she told you—it was she! Oh, God help me! God deliver me!"

She moaned with strange anguish. When she spoke again, it was in an altered tone.

"Docteur Guillaume, I neither coax nor pray now; I adjure you, I desire you to help me to see my husband to-night. On my head be the peril of the act, or on yours the sin of the refusal."

"I take the sin then," said Docteur Guillaume, stoutly. "Pray what makes you so anxious to see your husband to-night, Madame?"

"Right, I should have told you; you will yield when you know. Docteur Guillaume, I have been cruelly slandered to him. I know he does not believe it; but it must cut him to the very heart. I must see him; I must let him feel and know, in his very heart too, that I never cared for any one but for him. I must deliver him from the hands of those tormentors who could waylay his sick bed with such accusations, who could make you haunt him with the spectre of a will. I tell you I must see him; you see it now yourself, do you not?"

Docteur Guillaume was disturbed. He had never liked Mrs. Osborne; he mistrusted her in his heart; he liked Adèle, and had faith in her. He began to believe that she had undergone some strange wrong, that some strange scheme to hem in the sick man, and conquer him perhaps in a weak hour, was afloat.

"Madame," he said, "I am concerned at this; write to your husband; justify yourself; I will bear the letter."

"No—no, letters are cold and lifeless; they have no looks, no voice, no love in their very aspect," said Adèle, passionately. "He must see and feel me. One look, one touch of the hand, will justify me without a word. I must see him."

"Never through me," firmly said Docteur Guillaume.

Adèle laughed; he could not see her face, the night was too dark, but that laugh, sweet and girlish, though defiant, brought her careless aspect vividly before him.

"I will baffle you all," she said. "I will go to Lilian's room and take her away; and if I cannot see him, why Lilian shall sleep in my arms to-night."

"There never was a creature so perverse," indignantly cried Docteur Guillaume; "however, I am forearmed, and shall give due warning to Madame Osborne."

"She cannot watch two rooms at once. She is too subtle for me, and I am too subtle for Jeannette, and for you too, Docteur Guillaume."

"Very likely, Madame; very likely. Nevertheless, I shall do my best. We shall reach Courcelles in something like another quarter of an hour, and we shall see—we shall see, Madame, if you will baffle old Docteur Guillaume."

She did not reply—she spoke no more, save to say once languidly :

"Docteur Guillaume, pray ride slowly; this is very fatiguing."

"I dare say it is. The road is stony, and not particularly good. Six times, nay, seven, have I trotted up and down this road to-day, Madame."

He rode, nevertheless, as slowly and as softly too as Adèle could wish, daintily picking his way through soft muddy places. "Poor little thing!" he thought, "how could they have the heart to torment her. So young, so pretty, so fond of him! No wonder she turns him round her finger! Ah! Docteur Guillaume, you are an old bachelor; but you need not have been—you need not. You too could have had a pretty face at home, you too could have had a little fond heart to adore you, a tender little creature to protect and to love. Why did you not, Docteur Guillaume, why did you not? You were too wise, too clever, and now you are alone. The young wives of other men ride behind you and think no more of you than of an old tree, withered and bare. They coax you, they wheedle you, and they laugh at you. People say, Docteur Guillaume is privileged. But you know what it means. It means that you are nothing and no one, Docteur Guillaume."

The night was dark, but even on its darkness there rose a massive gloom. It was the Manor: the shutters were all closed; and not one starlike light from candle or lamp broke on its sombre façade.

"Here we are," said Docteur Guillaume to his companion; "can you——"

He paused in the question; the horse bore but one rider: Adèle was gone. Softly and noiselessly she had slipped away whilst Docteur Guillaume was riding slowly. She had told him so; she was too subtle for him.

At first Docteur Guillaume was astounded, then he rallied in-

dignantly, and roused the whole house with his knocking. Both Mathieu and his mistress came hurrying on, alarmed. Mrs. Osborne felt secretly convinced it was Adèle, and breathed relieved on seeing Docteur Guillaume alone. In broken and burning speech he told her all that he wished her to know.

"Madame, it is my duty to warn you, your daughter-in-law, who is the most perfidious little thing, is resolved to see Monsieur Osborne to-night or—so she says—to sleep with Mademoiselle Lilian, and take the small-pox.—I warn you—lock every door; capture her if you can, and lock her up; don't mind her if she prays or coaxes. She would wheedle you out of your senses. Good night, I have no more to say, take care."

"Then you have seen her?" said Mrs. Osborne eagerly.

"Yes, yes, good night. She will be here presently, I have no doubt of it."

"Stop! stop! what did she say?" exclaimed Mrs. Osborne, anxiously. But vainly her hand was stretched forth, Docteur Guillaume was gone; he was riding along the road.

Mathieu locked the door; Mrs. Osborne gave him a stern look.

"Have you let her in?" she asked; "where is she hiding?"

"Madame has promised me five hundred francs," said Mathieu, doggedly; "if Madame finds that I have let in a cat, let her not give me a sou."

He handed her the key of the door as he spoke. She took it; she took also the lamp which he held and went over the whole house. Everything was safe. Mrs. Osborne felt calmer when this survey was over; and turning to Mathieu, who had followed her, she said quietly—

"If Madame Osborne should come to-night, waken me—I will let her in myself. This is her house—she has a right to enter it. All I want is, that she should not take that dreadful disease by going near my son. You understand."

"Yes, yes—I understand," said Mathieu, sneering.

"It is a hard case to have to do with such low agents," muttered Mrs. Osborne.

CHAPTER LX.

THE CATASTROPHE.

Hours had worn away.

Dark was the night, moonless and starless. Low clouds stole down the mountains, and dropped a shower now and then, but though they melted away, they did not leave the sky more clear; it remained black and threatening.

Jeannette sat spinning in her low stone room; on the table near her burned a little brass lamp; its light was shed on Jeannette's solitary figure, and left the cold, bare room in comparative gloom. Anxious and troubled was Jeannette's face.

"Why did my thread break five times to-night?" she muttered half aloud. "I have noticed it, when my thread breaks, there is trouble coming. Do not tell me there is nothing in a spinner's thread. What strange story was that my young master told me once about the three women who sit alone and spin the lives of women and men? There is one who spins, there is one who holds the thread, there is another who clips it; yes, that is it. He drew her for me, and he gave her a long nose, but she had her revenge; poor fellow! the old witch clipped his thread short for him. Ah! why does she let mine spin out so long, so fine, so weak, to seventy woful years and more? Better be cut off in our strength like him, than linger to sad and solitary age, and look on at the same sad stories again and again. Broken once more—God save us! what is going to happen this night? If it breaks seven times it is a death. I shall not trust it."

Jeannette pushed away her wheel with secret dismay, then jumped on her chair and uttered a scream of terror: she had seen a white face with glittering eyes looking in at her through the glass panes of the window. Rapidly she made the sign of the cross, and shut her eyes tight and remained immovable on her chair; but a hand tapped at the window, and a voice said,—

"Let me in, Jeannette."

"It is his voice," she murmured; "I have not heard it for forty years, but it is his pretty, light, cheerful voice. He is come to call me, his old servant woman. Thank God, it was for me the thread broke."

"Jeannette! Jeannette! let me in!" said the voice; "do you not know me? I am Adèle, I am your mistress; let me in it is raining fast."

The voice sounded so lifelike that Jeannette opened her eyes with a start; the face at the window, though deadly pale, was so like that of Adèle, that the old woman, though more frightened at the living apparition than she had been at the supposed spirit, ran and opened at once. Adèle entered the room without speaking. Her face was white and rigid; her brow was contracted, her eyes were fixed and glittering, her clothes were wet with rain, her dripping hair clung to her colourless cheeks.

"Madame! Madame!" exclaimed Jeannette, but she could say no more.

"Yes, I am come back," said Adèle; "did you think that, unless in a moment of passion and woe, I could mean to leave him? No, no, I am come back, and this time I defy her and you to prevent me from seeing him. I thought to steal in to him unseen, to win by art what was denied to right; for two hours I have been watching in the rain around the house; but Fortune was against me, and I have been compelled to come in here to you. I know that you will try to be my enemy now as you were this morning, but I tell you, Jeannette, that if no other means avail me, I shall take desperate means. Give me the key, or I shall do something that will make you rue, to your dying day, ever having denied it to me."

Jeannette groaned.

"Madame, be calm, I entreat you. Good heavens! you are all wet——"

"The key," interrupted Adèle.

"And what use is it of, Madame? The doors are all locked and bolted; the key might as well be in the lake as in my pocket."

"The doors may be all locked and bolted," said Adèle, "and yet I shall see him to-night. Do you think it was through the door that I got here?"

"In the name of heaven, Madame, how did you get in?" asked Jeannette, for the first time struck with this circumstance.

Adèle laughed with dreary triumph.

"What matter," she replied, "I got in; I am here, and I shall see my husband to-night."

The wildness of her looks, of her short, broken tones, alarmed Jeannette. She seized the hands of her mistress, and said, with tears in her eyes:—

"Ah, Madame! for the love of all the saints, be calm. Sit here with me, dry your poor wet clothes, you do not know that woman, nor what she has been doing; the doors are all locked, your room——"

"The key—give me the key," imperatively said Adèle, withdrawing her hands from Jeannette's grasp.

"There it is," said Jeannette, taking it from her pocket and laying it on the table; "but I repeat it, it is useless to you; all the doors are locked, and she has the keys of them all."

Without replying, Adèle seized the key, and left the room by a door that led through a narrow and dark corridor to the interior of the house; but she soon came back.

"I cannot open the door," she said; "it is hard—try it you."

"Hard!" cried Jeannette, with a jump; "the door hard! Ah, Madame, that serpent has locked me in!"

She seized the lamp and ran to the door; the key was gone, the lock was fast. Jeannette might walk in the garden as long as she pleased, but could not take one step in the interior of the house. Bursting with impotent rage she returned to the room where she had left Adèle.

"Locked in," she cried, "locked in at my age! There never was anything like it. That was why she stood and looked at me at the foot of the staircase when I came in here. Oh, the serpent! the serpent!"

She put down her lamp, threw herself indignantly on a chair, and, looking around her, saw that Adèle was gone. Jeannette slapped her forehead distractedly.

"She will get in to him through the window and break her neck," she cried.

She ran out into the garden.

"Madame! Madame!" she called.

Vain cry; the night was dark and silent, no voice answered her.

A fine chill rain was falling, but Adèle ran through the gloomy garden with the speed of one to whom every turning was familiar, and to whom the darkness of the night was no obstacle. The house was silent and black as if death had already entered it. One bright spot alone broke on its gloom, it was the light that burned in Mr. Osborne's study. To that study a flight of steps led. Adèle lightly ascended them, and stealthily looked in. Mrs. Osborne sat by the table; the clear bright light of a lamp shone on her calm face. She was reading a letter with marked attention; at length she rose; she went to Mr. Osborne's door, but the entrance of her trusted Mathieu made her look round. Mrs. Osborne laid her finger on her lips and went up to him; she whispered something; she looked anxious; then softly and noise-

lessly locking the door of her stepson's room, she withdrew the key and left the study.

Adèle had watched all. "Ay, loek," she thought, "I shall get in for all that."

She stepped up on the stone balustrade that enclosed the narrow terrace; a sculptured ledge that ran along the wall connected it with the windows of the adjoining rooms. It was narrow enough for peril to the timid, broad enough for safety to the fearless. Adèle feared neither the darkness above, nor that below; one thought had placed her beyond all dread. Steadily she took five or six steps in the gloom; she reached a window; the sky had cleared a little; a faint light glittered on glass panes. Adèle broke one; the shattered fragments fell on the floor within; she passed in her hand, opened the window, and leaped in. She ran to the door, with an instinct that led her unerringly through the darkness. She felt for the lock, put in the key;—she opened it—she stood in her husband's room.

A night lamp burned faintly on a table; the bed was shrouded in its heavy curtains; he had not heard her; she approached softly; a moan of pain guided her to his pillow. Broken words, half of anguish, half of sorrow, were on his lips; she heard her name.

"Adèle, my little Adèle!"

She knelt down on the floor by him; she passed her arms around him; she laid her lips on his cheek. She had not time to speak; he knew her at once. He pressed her to his heart with troubled joy; he embraced her with passionate fondness, and trembled, unable to utter a word. Adèle, too, trembled.

"Ah, I have suffered," she said, "but I am here now; I can defy anything."

"Thank God you are safe!" he cried at length. "Where have you been?—what have they done to you? Say nothing—you are safe—it is all right."

"Oh, yes," thought Adèle, "it is all right;" but she said nothing; a sort of calmness, of silence, of repose, fell upon her. She was conscious but of one thing—she was with her husband; his voice, his welcome, had the old fondness; her head was on his pillow; her two hands were clasped in his;—this was, after what she had suffered, the one point of existence around which all else might move unheeded.

"Thank God!" he said again and again; then suddenly he turned away from her; with a sort of horror he dropped her hands; dead to her might be that fond clasp.

"Ah, I had forgotten!" he cried; "leave me; what brings you here?—leave me!"

But vainly he tried to put her away; her arms were a chain he could not break; the face he tried to shun, reposed, spite all his resistance, near his. He was too weak to prevail; he yielded; but he said again—

"What have you done?—what are you doing?"

"If you were to die this moment," she said, passionately, "and I the next, I should still bless God, and say—I am happy."

He saw and felt how useless was all opposition.

"Be it so," he said; "stay here with me; you have been to me the gift of God; I trust you to God's mercy."

"I knew you believed nothing against me," she said; "I knew it; I did for a moment think they had prevailed, but my heart soon told me—'do not believe them; they want to divide you from him, to make you rush into some desperate folly. Do not believe them; he loves you dearly; he never would condemn you unheard; never would he banish you from his home and his heart. Let them have their way!' Ah, she did not know when she looked after me from the window this morning, she did not know that I was resolved to be with you this very night. And here I am—here I am—I have baffled them all—every one."

She laughed a little wildly; he half started up; he raised the curtain; the light fell on her pale face; a singular smile played on her lips; her eyes had a fitful light.

He sank back with a dread so terrible that it overwhelmed him; forgetting all fears in one, he clasped her in his arms with a shudder full of woe.

"Ah, Adèle," he cried, "what is this? what have you been doing? why is your hair wet and dishevelled? why are your garments torn? why is there blood on your hand?"

She laughed again, and the wild aspect that had terrified him faded away into the old mischievous smile.

"I am wet, because it is raining," she said, gaily; "my clothes are torn, because I crept in through a hedge; and I cut my hand, because Madame Osborne has locked you in, and I had to get in at you through the window."

"Ah, what will not love do?" said Mr. Osborne, with a sigh; "what will not love do?"

"Hush! you are speaking too much; sleep."

She laid her finger on his lips. He smiled, and closed his eyes, more from the light that pained him than to sleep really. Adèle leaned her elbow on his pillow, and resting her cheek on her hand, she looked down at him, and thought—

"All is over. Oh, God, all good, all merciful, I bless Thee ! In a few days he must, he will be well—all is over."

A slight sound made her raise her eyes : Mrs. Osborne stood on the other side of the bed with a paper in her hand ; she looked at her stepson, at his wife, and she trembled from head to foot with resentment. She was defeated and conquered ; the enemy had reached the heart of the citadel. Adèle raised her forefinger, and smiled.

"Hush !" she said, in a whisper, "he is sleeping." That was her revenge.

The blue eyes of Mrs. Osborne flashed fire ; anger passed over that cold face which emotion so rarely stirred ; her lip turned white, and quivered, but she had not time to speak. Mr. Osborne opened his eyes, turned round, and looked at her calmly.

"Excuse me for intruding upon you," said Mrs. Osborne, with an unnatural laugh, "but I heard voices talking, and I felt too much surprised and alarmed to knock. Do you remember, William, the promise I made you a few hours ago ?"

"I remember it," he said.

"You defied me to give you proofs ?"

"And I do still !" he replied, indignantly.

She threw the paper which she held on his bed, and looked down at him with a smile of mingled triumph and scorn. For Mrs. Osborne was a careful woman : she had saved a letter from the burning.

Mr. Osborne looked attentively at the letter, folded it up, and gave it to Adèle, with the request—

"Put that away carefully, child.—I am very much obliged to you," he added, turning to Mrs. Osborne, "for having brought me that letter. It is, as I thought, an impudent forgery ; but it will suffice to convince Monsieur de Launay that he has been a miserable dupe, and that is enough."

"You talk too much," said Adèle, chidingly ; "sleep, I say."

Mrs. Osborne looked at them both, and the blood rushed up red and burning to her brow.

"William," she said, passionately, "I shall never forgive you."

She turned on her heel, left the room without waiting for a reply, and slammed the door after her with a violence worthy of Isabella.

The next morning she was gone. Thus ended in bitter and shameful defeat this insolent attempt to replace by a detested stepmother, a wife young, beautiful, and fondly loved. An

attempt so insolent that if insolence were not the very nature of ambition ; if it were not by insolence that men prevail over other men, far more than by talent, genius, courage of heart or nobleness of mind, it might well seem incredible.

With a start, Adèle, who sat by Mr. Osborne's bed, heard the carriage that bore away her enemy roll along the road. She looked at her husband—he had heard nothing ; he was sleeping calmly, with his face turned to her.

Who shall blame her if she exulted in that hour ? Who shall blame her if she rejoiced that his bitter task, that his woful trust were over. Who shall blame her if, triumphant and glad, she thought, " In a few days he shall be well again ; in a few days we shall enjoy our beautiful, our pleasant home in happy solitude. No jealous heart, no evil eye, no enemy, no friend shall come between us—Courcelles shall be our heavenly elysium, our terrestrial paradise."

Fond dreamer ! Elysium was a fable ; the angel's flaming sword guards Eden until the judgment day ; mortal foot shall tread no more those verdant paths ; mortal lips shall breathe no more that celestial air ! Did she not see that worn and haggard face, did not the heavy breathing, the contracted brow, tell her their menacing story ? they did not. Hope laid her hand on her eyes and blinded her ; Love poured a tale in her ear that excluded every other recital. She saw, she guessed nothing ; and when the truth came, it crushed her.

Without knock, without warning, Mathieu entered the room ; he went up to his master's wife ; he placed a bunch of keys on the table near her ; he laid a letter by them, and silent and sullen as he had entered, he departed.

Adèle broke the seal and read :—

" I have desired Mathieu to give you some of the keys ; Jean has the rest. You will oblige me by letting me know if you found everything right ; you can direct to Madame Osborne, Poste Restante, Paris. I trust you will write at your earliest convenience. My sense of duty will not let me leave Courcelles without giving you two warnings, of which you may make such use as you please.

" Mathieu is dishonest ; he stole a diamond ring from me this morning. It is not the small-pox which Mr. Osborne has, but typhus. He has not told me so, perhaps he does not know it ; but *Docteur Guillaume cannot deny it !*"

The letter dropped from the hand of Adèle ; she looked at her husband with silent despair. He was still sleeping ; heavy,

passive were his slumbers. The lover-like solitude, the happy hours in house and garden, vanished in darkness. Adèle saw nothing now, nothing but a sick-bed; she watched on one side, and on the other she saw death calmly biding his hour. Truly Mrs. Osborne had not gone without her revenge.

Dull daylight filled the room, but the night lamp still burned, and Mr. Osborne still slept, when, ushered by Jean, Docteur Guillaume entered. Adèle was kneeling by the bed of her husband, with her head sunk on it; she raised her face on hearing him; its pale, mute woe silenced the reproaches on Docteur Guillaume's lips.

"Come, come," he said softly, "he will get better."

He saw she knew all.

"He awoke once last night," she replied, "and he did not know me. He called me by his stepmother's name, and he defied me to prevail; he dared me to utter the name of his wife with censure or reproach. Docteur Guillaume, they have killed him."

Docteur Guillaume never tolerated exaggeration.

"They may have taken away a chance of life," he said, "but that is not killing. I am sorry he is delirious so soon, though."

She was still kneeling; she turned her face to him with a sort of quiet awe: underneath her breath, she asked,—

"Do you think he will die?"

"I hope not—I trust not."

Even he could say no more.

"Come, come," he again said, very softly, "we will do our best, and you must trust in God."

"I must—I must," she said, with something like despair.

Ay, you must, indeed! The hour of trial has come; the hour when man is weak or betrays; when God alone is true and strong.

The word "trust" caught Mr. Osborne's ear as he slowly awakened. He gave them both a look that knew them not.

"Poor things!" he said; "have you, too, got anything in trust?—then I pity you—I pity you."

Adèle rose calm and collected.

"Docteur Guillaume," she said, "forget that I am his wife; tell me what I am to do; treat me like a nurse in an hospital. Do not mind my feelings—I have none—save to obey you, and, with God's will, to save him."

"Come now, I call that sensible," said Docteur Guillaume, approvingly, "and if you will be cool and self-possessed, why you will give back that chance to life of which they basely robbed him."

Did Docteur Guillaume believe that?—we know not; but his words were as magic. She drew in her breath, she nerved her breaking heart, and she vowed, come what would, to suffer and to bear.



THE CLOSE.

BITTER are those hours of trial and suspense; bitter in daily life; then let even their faint image uselessly darken no page. Providence answered the prayer; the trust was not rejected; the boon was granted, and after much sorrow, after dread and heart-sinking, came peace: Mr. Osborne recovered. He might have died—he lived; the disease which had spared him might have struck her down, the wearied watcher; it did not. She, too, was dealt with very tenderly; there remained the memory of a great dread; of days when the sun shone to mock her misery, when nature smiled on all her woe; when nights were haunted with spectres, and on all this followed a sudden hour of delight, tumultuous in its joy; then a calm, divine peace.

We have little to explain or to tell. Capitaine Joseph, who has recovered his panic, will never have to decide which of the three Mademoiselles Mazois he is to marry. They were all married on the same morning, a month ago, at Nantua; the presentiment of Madame Mazois was fulfilled in a very remarkable manner; Madame de Launay died suddenly whilst Mr. Osborne was ill; the subtle, unquiet schemer is at rest. Monsieur Morel was never heard of; Jeannette maintains to this day that it was he who set fire to the Manor; Mr. Osborne thinks it was Marie reading. Of one fact there can be no doubt; it was Monsieur Morel who sent the letter, and who, under the name of Adèle, had kept up a tender correspondence with Monsieur de Launay. How he could succeed in making that gentleman his dupe, for what purpose he did do so, whether he extorted money as the price of his silence, or was satisfied with using his power in business matters, are questions which no one, save Monsieur de Launay, could answer, and on which he has chosen to remain profoundly silent. A cold and guarded letter of regret he has, indeed, written to Mr. Osborne, but there correspondence has ceased between them. Part of the truth Mr. Osborne knows, and part he conjectures; but there is one point which his imagination has never embraced, and with which his credence shall never be

taxed. He already thinks it insolent enough that Monsieur de Launay should have presumed to think of Adèle, even when deluded with imaginary encouragement; he shall never know that Monsieur Morel's presumption went much farther.

"One need not tell everything, Monsieur Jean," says Jeanette to her ancient admirer, who thinks that Mademoiselle Jeanette is both wise and discreet, and approves unconditionally. Both the old servants are thoroughly happy: Mademoiselle de Janson has been heard of; she is coming to the Manor to make sure that the forge is really silent,—but this is a secret. Lilian, we need scarcely say, recovered rapidly; she is now running in the broad alley of the garden, whilst Mr. Osborne and his wife sit quietly in one of the arbours. He is reading to her the following letter; he has just received it. It is dated Paris, Hotel Mirecour. Mrs. Osborne is the writer:

"SIR,—

"I have this morning received a letter from you which has, I confess it, surprised me.

"You offer me and my daughters a settlement; in plain speech, we are to live somewhere at your expense, and be held a burthen on your means.

"You surprise me; I must recapitulate some facts, I must refresh your memory.

"A year ago your father chose to make you his heir; he left you a vast business, a magnificent connection in trust; he bequeathed his widow and her three children to your care also in trust; where much has been given, much will be required.

"How have you repaid that confidence?—how fulfilled that trust? The business which, in his lifetime, yielded a magnificent income, has perished in your hands. Strange to say, you have even been a loser; your private income has suffered; a splendid inheritance, which would enrich most men, impoverishes you. Strange, I repeat it.

"That is not all.

"How have you dealt with your brother, with your sisters, with me? I will tell you briefly, for the subject is not one on which your father's widow likes to dwell; you have belied him, you have wronged them, you have insulted me; you now add to that insult by your offer as impertinently worded as it is impertinently meant.

"Sir, I thank you. I am now residing with my daughter, Madame la Baronne de Launay; in her husband I have found a

devoted and respectful son; and Anna and Robert, who are with me, have, in him, I feel and know, what they never had in *you—a brother*.

"Your inquiry concerning Capitaine Joseph I cannot answer. He has ceased to be my son. He is your friend and the friend of your wife, of whom I wish to say nothing. She has injured me deeply; I forgive her.

"I have the honour, sir,

"To subscribe myself, yours obediently,

"ISABELLA OSBORNE."

Mr. Osborne folded up this letter, and said with a smile: "Poor de Launay! he has got my inheritance. We can forgive him, Adèle, can we not?"

"What a strange woman Madame Osborne must be," said Adèle.

"Aye, very strange indeed: she has some good qualities, of which she makes the most: she shows them so much that people get tired of them; I did at last. Her bad and dangerous gifts she keeps out of sight, like poisons in a druggist's shop—she knows they are not pleasant to look at; that they suggest ugly thoughts; she hides them well; who can blame her? Now and then, indeed, she uses them, but always with a careful and sparing hand; for she knows they are deadly."

Adèle looked up at her husband. "How calmly you take it," she said.

"And how should I take it then?" he asked, smiling. "Child, an insulting and insolent letter is nothing. It went hard with me indeed a year ago, when a hand I could not resist laid on me this most wearisome task, this bitter burden, this torment of toiling for and striving against a family I could not love. God has removed it all from me; that presence which I could not endure, and which, therefore, I bore with sullen patience, has left me, and for ever. When I waken in the morning I say 'It is over;' when I fall asleep at night, I say 'It is over—'"

"And I have got a wife," added Adèle, "and that is not over, and never shall be."

She spoke with happy triumph. He had emerged a free man from the shackles of his trust, and through his bondage she had won him, even as he had found her; well might they now both smile; they had conquered adverse Fate.

Happy are they whose lives yield that beautiful lesson; we cannot seek good in vain. One particular good indeed we may

fail to reach, but only to win a greater, unthought of and unsought.

When Saul went forth in the desert to seek his father's strayed asses, he found not them, but instead a kingdom. The trust Mr. Osborne had accepted he could not fulfil. He had not redeemed the falling house from ruin; he had not guided with steady hand a rebellious family; he had not reconciled heterogeneous elements. Loss, strife, discord, had been his lot; but the blessing which falls on the willing heart, on the sacrifice of inclination to duty, had not been withheld. The bequest of his father had made him meet Adèle, the dishonesty of his brother had given him his wife, the very perversity of his family had bound her him to more closely, more tenderly than his own love and indulgence. A prophet once went forth to pronounce a curse, and his tongue could only utter a blessing: all toil, all evil had turned into good for William Osborne.

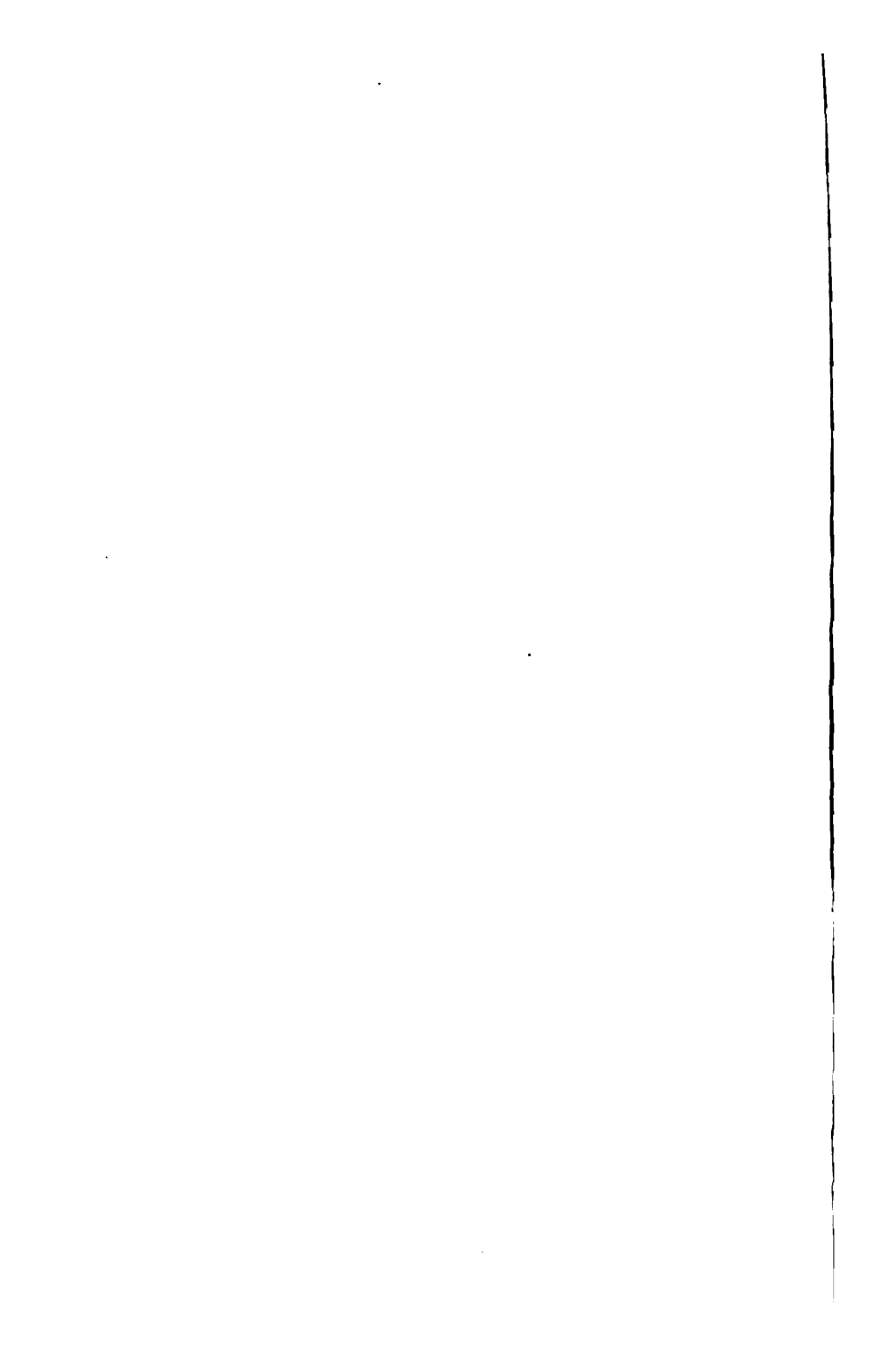
A strange sweetness, a strange repose have now fallen on his life. It is as if some good genius had removed every anxious care from his brain, every sad thought from his heart. He has no wish to fulfil. Fate can deny him the accomplishment of no desire. He feels in a state of great calmness, in a mood of rest which so seldom falls to the lot of man, that when it comes we may well hold it as all but divine; as a foretaste on earth of the mingled bliss and repose of Heaven. Nothing in Adèle distracts that happy quietude. She is ardent, but once satisfied that she is beloved, she cannot be exacting. The sun is glad to shine, and she is glad to live and love without caring why or how.

Alice, too, is happy, though differently; one hopes, the other rests.

The sky has not a cloud; the lake is as calm as the sky; the mountains have a sunny look; pleasant is the old garden and flourishing as in its prime. Lilian is laughing behind the box-wood hedge, and William Osborne and his wife are sitting side by side in one of the many arbours.

When life flows so sweetly, when change cannot trouble, when sorrow has fled—the tale is told.







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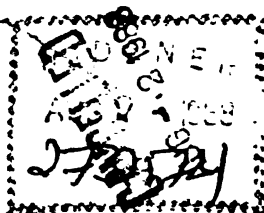
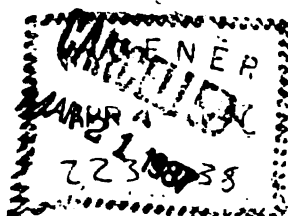
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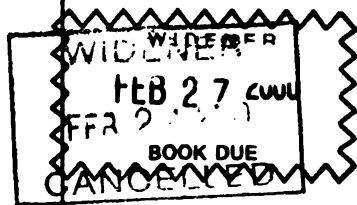


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